The New Criterion

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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Editor *Hilton Kramer*

Publisher *Samuel Lipman*

Managing Editor *Erich Eichman*

Assistant Managing Editor *Eva Szent-Miklosy*

Business Manager *Robert Richman*

Office Manager *Kimberly Ohnemus*

Contributors to this issue

Bruce Bawer received his Ph.D. in English at SUNY, Stony Brook, in 1983. His dissertation was devoted to the poetry of Delmore Schwartz, Randall Jarrell, Robert Lowell, and John Berryman.

Joseph Frank's *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1849-1859,* the second volume of his biography of Dostoevsky, was published in December by Princeton University Press.

Dan Hofstadter's article on Anders Zorn appeared in the January issue of *The New Criterion.*

Marnie Jones teaches English at Northwestern University. She is currently working on a biography of Samuel "Golden Rule" Jones.

Roger Kimball is a free-lance writer. He has written for *The Thomist* and *The Bennington Review.*

Liza A. Knapp is a doctoral candidate in the Slavic Department of Columbia University. Her translation of the Dostoevsky deposition is taken from *The Dostoevsky Case,* a collection, in translation, of documents and testimony relating to Dostoevsky's role in the Petrashevsky Affair. *The Dostoevsky Case* will be published later this year by Ardis Publishers. Copyright 1984, Ardis Publishers.

Mimi Kramer is the regular theater critic for *The New Criterion.*

Samuel Lipman is the music critic for *Commentary.* A new book of his essays, *The House of Music,* will be published by David R. Godine in March.

Tom Nieman is an editor at Scott, Foresman and Co.

Eva Resnikova's article, "The Mystery of Terpsichore: Balanchine, Stravinsky, and *Apollo,*" appeared in the September, 1983, issue of *The New Criterion.*

Patrick J. Smith's most recent book is *A Year at the Met* (Knopf).

René Wellek is Sterling Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature at Yale University.

Vernon Young is the author of *Cinema Borealis: Ingmar Bergman and the Swedish Ethos.*

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The MLA centennial follies

by Hilton Kramer

'Tis hard to say, if greater want of skill
Appear in writing or in judging ill;
But, of the two, less dang'rous is th' offence
To tire our patience, than mislead our sense.
—Alexander Pope, in "An Essay on Criticism"

It had been a good many years since fortune had first brought us to enter the labyrinthine purlieus of the Modern Language Association's annual convention, and memories of our early experience of that event were not so redolent of pleasure—or, for that matter, of intelligence and enlightenment—that we had reason to feel a keen sense of regret over the many meetings we had missed in the interval. It was over thirty years ago, in fact, that our earliest encounters with this holiday-season jamboree of the country's literary scholars and their apprentices took place, and our occasional return visits to the scenes of their revels over the years had come more and more to assume the character of journeys to a foreign country in which we had once, long ago, thought of taking up residence. Even in that distant era, to be sure, no one had ever claimed that the atmosphere was enchanting or the blandishments irresistible, but the place itself was nonetheless renowned for conducting its affairs with a good deal of confidence, authority, and rigor. If it did not earn a place in one's affections, there was at least never any question about its identity or purpose. If it was known to be dull and to offer few appeals to the literary mind, this was mainly because its principal industry—scholarship in the then prevailing orthodox mode—did not customarily entail the kind of labor which lent itself to the excitements and perturbations to be found in the neighboring literary landscape.

Thirty years ago, such perturbations as could be found at an MLA convention were likely to have derived from the debate over the New Criticism and its influence on the teaching of literature. This was a highly divisive issue at the time, and a good many academic careers were made (or broken) on the basis of its resolution. The scholars in charge of the MLA held out as long as they could against this dreaded incursion into the realm they had long dominated without challenge. Then the day came when, the epigones of the New Criticism having grown too numerous and too powerful to be resisted, the MLA threw open its doors to them. Make no mistake about it: the debate over the New Criticism was sometimes fierce, and the issues it raised were anything but trivial. (Cleanth Brooks has lately given us an interesting account of them in an essay entitled, "In Search of the New Criticism."[1]) Yet it is with a certain poignancy and even nostalgia that we look back on that episode today—now that the standards of literary culture shared by both sides of that old debate are, along with the rigor and decorum of the period, so completely gone with the wind.

1 See *The American Scholar* for Winter 1983/84.

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Much else, of course, had happened in more recent years—to the MLA and its annual convention, to the study of literature in the universities, and to the larger cultural world which exerts a direct influence on both. For one thing, there had been the radical takeover of the MLA in 1968, and in more recent years the rising tide of academic feminist studies. It was in the hope of acquiring a closer look at the consequences of these and other developments that we set out to attend the association's most recent meeting. It seemed a particularly propitious moment to do so. This year's convention—held, according to custom, during the last week of December—marked the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the MLA. It was therefore to be expected that a special effort would be made to offer the association's membership something in the way of an exemplary program on this occasion.

The MLA program committee could certainly not be accused of stinting on the sheer *number* of sessions which it served up at this year's convention. The official Centennial Program, published in November as a special number of *PMLA*, the association's journal, listed nearly seven hundred separate sessions, and others were added after the program went to press. (One of the additions was an evening reading by the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges.) These hundreds of forums were divided between the two Manhattan hotels—the New York Hilton and the Sheraton Center—where the convention was in session for four days and three nights (December twenty-seventh to thirtieth), and even the most dedicated auditor could not hope to attend more than a fraction of them.

Not that anyone was expected to. A convention of this sort is designed to cater to a great many specialized interests, and the MLA long ago gave up anything resembling a rigorous standard in determining what could, or could not, be discussed under its auspices. If the Division on Comparative Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature wished to hear a lecture on "Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Venereal Disease in the Eighteenth Century," then the program committee was only too happy to schedule such an event as one of three sessions with the fetching title of "Sluts, Slatterns, Soubrettes, and Seductresses." If the Division on Gay Studies in Language and Literature wished to devote a session to "Homosexuality and Biography" and the Gay Caucus for the Modern Languages wished to have one on "Lesbian and Gay Theater Today," then these too were readily added to the program. Likewise the Marxist Literary Group was welcome to organize a session on "The Future of Marxist Feminism and the Problem of History," while the Radical Caucus in English and the Modern Languages arranged a discussion of "The Politics of the New Formalism" and the International Brecht Society devoted its panel to "Brecht and Women" (principal paper: "Female Heterosexual Sublimation and Resolutions of Mother-Son Incest Bonding in Certain Brecht Plays"). "Doris Lessing and Africa" was the subject chosen by the Doris Lessing Society, while the Division on Film gave its attention to "Theoretical Approaches to Television."

The MLA program committee, obviously well-practiced in such matters, proved for the most part to be very shrewd in estimating the kind of response that each of the hundreds of topics could be expected to elicit. Thus, the symposium devoted to the theme of "The Fate of Pleasure," based (ostensibly) on an essay by the late Lionel Trilling and boasting such academic star-turns as Leo Bersani, Ihab Hassan, and Richard Poirier among the participants, was booked for 10:15 in the morning in the Grand Ballroom of the Hilton, where it met with a huge response, whereas the session on "Literature and Revolution in Central America: Nicaragua and El Salvador" was relegated to much smaller quarters at 7:15 in the evening and did not fill even the modest space allotted to it. Certain topics proved (surprisingly) not to have the drawing power expected of them, however. A session entitled "The Ghosts of Theology in Contemporary Literary Theory: Deconstruction and the Death of God" was

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assigned a very large meeting room, but even with its fashionable subject and the redoubtable J. Hillis Miller of Yale University as the chief attraction, it was only sparsely attended at 3:30 in the afternoon. A morning session devoted to the recent work of Raymond Williams, the radical British critic and cultural historian, was, on the other hand, a veritable mob scene, no doubt owing to the participation of Terry Eagleton, the English Marxist critic and theorist, who journeyed from Oxford for the occasion and was greeted by many of those present as little less than the risen messiah.

Charting a course through this crowded terrain would clearly be no easy matter. The attractions were so many and so various, and the topics—many of them, anyway—so remote from what, as recently as twenty years ago, would have passed muster as legitimate subjects of literary study. Then, too, the remarkable absence of really distinguished senior literary scholars among the speakers on the more traditional literary subjects cast a kind of pall over the proceedings as a whole. It would be invidious to mention the names of the outstanding figures who did *not* participate in the convention's programs, yet it must be said that their absence was keenly felt. In the intellectual void created by this absence, a great many exotic (not to say grotesque) growths had come to flower.

Still, our task on this occasion was to listen to what those who now think of themselves as literary scholars actually talk about, and a closer study of the Centennial Program soon revealed that the subjects offered for discussion were not quite as various as they at first had seemed. A great many of them, for example, fell under the general rubric of feminist studies, which have now extended their range to just about every area of literary and cultural research. Thus, on the very first evening of the convention (December twenty-seventh), we were offered sessions on "Fallen Women in Victorian Fiction," "Prostitution in English Renaissance Drama," "The Power of Subversion: Female Narrative Discourse in Hispanic Literature," "Female French Poetry: Finding a Feminine Voice," "The Poet and the Poem: Race, Sex, and Language in Ingeborg Bachmann," "Female Poets of the Italian Cinquecento," "Ellen Glasgow: Feminism and Beyond," "Woman and Love in Paul Claudel's Works: A Feminist Outlook," "Wharton's Women: Victims or Self-Saboteurs?" "The Relationship of Women's Studies to the Study of Women and Literature," and "Women Making Literary History: The New Generation of Women Writers in the GDR," as well as papers at other sessions on "Women in Cheever" and "Gender and God: The Effect of Sexist Language on Thought." On subsequent days there were sessions devoted to "Feminist Re-Visions of German Literary History," "Scholarly Approaches to Women's Writing: Defining Feminist Criticism," "Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare," "Reading and Sexual Difference," "The New Female Writer in Post-Franco Spain," "Integrating Women's Studies into the Foreign Language Classroom: New Problems, New Solutions," "Feminist Perspectives of Kafka," and so on.

Another large block of meetings was devoted to the theory and practice of radical politics in relation—though sometimes the relation was a little tenuous—to the study of literature and cultural life. We have already mentioned some of these, and one or two others will be discussed below. In the sessions we attended, it was more or less taken for granted that revolution on one or another Marxist model was a good thing. It is doubtful, of course, that everyone attending the MLA convention—or even, for that matter, these particular sessions—agreed with the Marxist views they were designed to propagate. Yet to the extent that political ideology was given official sanction in the Centennial Program, that ideology was largely Marxist or feminist or some radical combination of both. No other social or sexual views—except, of course, those deriving from the doctrinaire programs of male homosexuality—found their way into the convention's program. No one, moreover, seemed to regard all this as a particularly

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noteworthy phenomenon. In American academic life, this development now seems pretty much taken for granted.

To aid us in our coverage of the crowded Centennial Program, we invited two colleagues—Samuel Lipman and Bruce Bawer—to attend some of the sessions we could not get to and which they had a special competence to discuss. Their reports appear elsewhere in this issue. What follows, then, are our own notes on the first three days of the convention.

We began with the official opening session on Tuesday evening, December twenty-seventh—the so-called Centennial Forum devoted to "The MLA and Literary and Linguistic Study and Teaching." The eight speakers included Ralph Ellison, the distinguished novelist; Geoffrey Marshall, Deputy Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities; Helen H. Vendler of Boston University; and Northrop Frye of the University of Toronto. Yet quite the most illuminating talk was that of Richard Lloyd-Jones of the University of Iowa who spoke on "The Study and Teaching of Writing." This was a well-prepared paper—actually the best that we heard at the convention—which traced the impact of such historical developments as the establishment of the land-grant colleges, the G.I. Bill, and the civil rights movement of the Sixties on the teaching of composition to undergraduates. Without polemics or even any evident emotion, it offered many vivid insights into the causes and consequences of the decline in literacy and literary competence among our college students. Professor Lloyd-Jones's observation, for example, that "the 'Great Society' eliminated failing grades," had the kind of historical resonance we hardly expect to encounter on occasions of this sort, and his dour conclusion—that history has forced us now to begin to *teach* writing to our students on an individual basis—almost gave us a sense of hope about a situation so generally accepted as hopeless.

Professor Vendler, in her address on "The Study and Teaching of Literature," left one with a very different impression. Surveying the shifts which had occurred in the study of literature during the century of the MLA's existence, she readily acknowledged that both teachers and students were now more ignorant and ill-equipped to deal with literary study than they used to be, but she found nothing to deplore or lament in this situation. She accepted it with amazing equanimity. The only thing she found worth deploring, in fact, was the reluctance of certain diehards to embrace the now fashionable methodologies of Marxist and deconstructionist literary study. It was a truly odd experience, in this respect, to sit in the audience at the Centennial Forum of the MLA and listen to Professor Vendler, a keynote speaker and former president of the association, describe Professor René Wellek as "an old fogey," no doubt on the basis of the essay he had just published in *The New Criterion*.[2] In Professor Vendler's view, it was silly, if not indeed senile, to proffer such criticism of the current state of literary studies. For after all, she reminded us, the ideas now in fashion are here today and gone tomorrow, and there is no need to choose sides on such questions. She herself, however, seemed quite comfortable with the side she had chosen, no doubt buoyed up in her conviction by an awareness that a great many of the programs at this centennial convention fully supported her views.

On the following morning, we went directly to the session on Raymond Williams, where, needless to say, there was no question of anyone opposing Marxist methodologies. The first speaker, Pamela McCullum of the University of Calgary, discussed Williams's theory of tragedy. Although she took Williams to task for, as she put it, a "lack of hermeneutic rigor" in his theory, she was nonetheless pleased that he put forward the notion of tragedy as the representation of the failure of revolution, and thus contributed to the achievement of a "de-alienated" society. For her, as for so many Marxists, in

2 See "Destroying Literary Studies" in the December 1983 issue.

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a society which had achieved revolution, tragedy would become an obsolete form. We somehow had the impression that Professor McCullum had not devoted much study to societies which had experienced the dealienating delights of Marxist revolution.

She was followed by Michael Ryan of Miami University in Ohio, whose theme was "Science of Culture or Cultural Politics?" As anyone who has read Professor Ryan's recent work on *Marxism and Deconstruction*[3] would expect, his was a far more open declaration of political ideology. Calling for the development of political strategies to bring about radical change, he dismissed Williams's theories as mere "sociology." What was wanted, he insisted, was a greater sense of "social struggle" in cultural studies. Oddly enough, the concrete examples he cited were all drawn not from literature but from Hollywood films, and it was no surprise, perhaps, that he much preferred the kind of films which had lately been produced in Cuba under the Castro regime. The latter, he avowed, were attempting—among much else, we assume—"to reconstruct male sexuality on more egalitarian lines."

Then came Terry Eagleton speaking on "Raymond Williams and Marxism." In this presentation there was much talk of "base" and "superstructure," and Williams was severely criticized for his failure to ally his theory of "cultural materialism" with what Eagleton was not embarrassed to call "the class struggle." Eagleton called upon Williams to come clean in making an open commitment to revolutionary Marxism—"the richest and most revolutionary heritage" we have, he reminded the audience—and concluded by declaring that the abolition of capitalism and "the property system" remains a prerequisite to achieving "a new culture." It was interesting, by the way, that in answer to a question from the audience about the writings of Edmund Wilson and Malcolm Cowley, Eagleton refused even to acknowledge the content of the question and instead used the occasion to describe Raymond Williams as "the last of the Victorian sages"—meaning, of course, that, despite appearances to the contrary and as good as he was, Williams just wasn't revolutionary enough for him.

It was something of a relief to leave this discussion and turn to the first of three sessions on "Sluts, Slatterns, Soubrettes, and Seductresses," but alas, Dr. William B. Ober's lecture on "Obstetrics, Gynecology, etc.," though instructive about medicine, did not really have much to do with the study of literature, and so, after listening for forty minutes or so, we opted for lunch instead.

In the early afternoon we shifted our attention to the Regency Ballroom at the Sheraton Center where the subject under discussion was "Postmodernism versus Modernism: Different Dialectics for Different Arts." Most of it was pretty dreary stuff (Susan Rubin Suleiman of Harvard University spoke, for example, about something called "Metatextual Labels and Textual Properties"). But the session proved to be worthwhile, all the same, for the last speaker was the painter and critic Walter Darby Bannard, who gave a brilliant analysis of the postmodern art scene and its relation to the current art market. Yet by introducing the question of "excellence" in art—his talk was actually called "Excellence and Postexcellence"—Mr. Bannard seemed to leave the audience quite befuddled. Excellence was not a concept they were familiar with—it seemed, as you might say, to lack ontology, and it is doubtful if most of those listening had any idea of what Mr. Bannard was talking about. They were much more comfortable with Professor Suleiman's "Metatextual Labels."

Our next stop brought us back to the Hilton, where a ballroom had been reserved for a panel on "Book Reviewing—Pleasures, Problems, Politics," arranged by the National Book Critics Circle. The panelists were Morris Dickstein of Queens College;

3 *Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation* by Michael Ryan. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.

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Katha Pollitt, literary editor of *The Nation*; and Le Ann Schreiber, an editor on the staff of *The New York Times Book Review*. This was another sparsely attended session; it seemed mainly to attract people who wanted to know how they could break into professional book reviewing. We didn't stay for the entire session, but we did hear one comment that was illuminating. Joel Conarroe, the moderator, invited the panelists to comment on the distinction between book reviewing and literary scholarship—not an inappropriate question for a session at an MLA convention. Or so one would have thought. Yet in Professor Dickstein's reply—he was the only academic among the panelists, and so the question fell to him—he somehow managed to overlook the fact that scholarly writing was expected to be based on original research. The dread subject of research just never came up. Which, come to think of it, was consistent with every other session of the convention we attended. No doubt it was discussed *somewhere* at the convention, but it kept, as they say, a low profile.

Much to our regret, we missed the papers given that afternoon by a special delegation of scholars from the Soviet Union. But in the evening we returned for two sessions: one at the Hilton on "New Approaches to the Canon: Marxism, Deconstructionism, Philosophy," and the Presidential Address given by Mary Ann Caws at the Sheraton Center. When Professor Caws's presidential address proved to be all but incomprehensible—a specialist in modern French poetry, she had confected a kind of surrealist fantasy which we could not penetrate—we visited two other sessions at the Sheraton. One was devoted to "Simone de Beauvoir: Her Life, Her Work, Her Influence," the other to the program on "Literature and Revolution in Central America." At the de Beauvoir session, we heard a young woman passionately denounce one of the translators of de Beauvoir's work—somehow we assumed the translator must have been a man—for misrepresenting her feminist views, yet the speaker herself could not correctly pronounce even the most elementary French words. No one seemed to find this funny.

At the session on "New Approaches to the Canon," the most interesting speaker was the same Michael Ryan we had heard in the morning. Professor Ryan was having a busy day at the literary barricades, and on this occasion it was Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* that he had isolated for what he called "political criticism." In this paper there were dark references to "the corporatist model of nature," as well as to racism, sexism, and colonialism. Mention was also made of "the privileging of the phallus." (A great many MLA panelists, by the way, have now taken to using the word "privilege" as a verb.) But what really seemed to be on Professor Ryan's mind was, once again, the movies. When he turned to the film *Apocalypse Now* and began to speak of President Reagan's views on the Vietnam War, we left. Perhaps it should be noted that Professor Ryan opened his talk by dedicating it to the memory of his mentor, the late Paul de Man of Yale University.

On Thursday, the twenty-ninth, we were up bright and early for our first session of the new day: "Is There a Contemporary Art-Politics Avant-Garde? Theoretical and Practical Perspectives." Although booked into a small room at the Hilton and attracting only a handful of people, this turned out to be an important meeting for it gave us a crucial clue to what might be called the sub-text of virtually all the sessions we attended. It was in the course of Philip E. Bishop's talk on "Kristeva and Bürger: Emancipatory Models for the Avant-Garde" that we heard the avant-garde spoken of "as a perpetual struggle for emancipation," and the light began to dawn. Then the next speaker—Russell A. Berman of Harvard University, speaking on "Denouncing the Avant-Garde: Neoconservatism and Post-modernism"—linked what he called "the project of political progress" to "the project of emancipated subjectivity." Professor Berman did not seem to know much about neoconservatism—it was our impression that he had read Peter Steinfels's book, *The Neoconservatives,* and little else—

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but he was certainly right in suggesting that neoconservatives tend to be opposed to projects of "emancipated subjectivity." And it was *this* that many of the speakers at the MLA were really talking about: *emancipated subjectivity.* Once grasped, it made everything else wonderfully clear. In preparation for the next session of the morning, we had been re-reading Trilling's essay "The Fate of Pleasure," and one particularly sharp sentence in it now reverberated in our consciousness with a new meaning. "Our high culture," Trilling wrote, "invites us to transfer our energies from the bourgeois competition to the spiritual competition." What else was this "project of emancipated subjectivity" but this misplaced "spiritual competition" in a new and more virulent guise? And what a fierce competition it was!

Armed with this newly acquired insight, we marched off to the major event of the morning—the symposium on "The Fate of Pleasure" in the Grand Ballroom. Foolishly (as it turned out), we had come in the expectation that the participants would be discussing Trilling's essay, one of the most interesting of his later writings. But this was not in fact the case. Far from it. True, the presiding officer of the proceedings—Kathleen Woodward of the University of Wisconsin—acknowledged that the title of the symposium was drawn from Trilling's essay. But she quickly assigned other meanings to the title, and before we quite knew what was happening, there she was talking about the fate not of pleasure but of Roland Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text.* Which, to say the least, is something else.

Leo Bersani, the next speaker, also made short shrift of the Trilling essay, which he dismissed as "typical of the New York critical essay." Lionel Trilling interested Professor Bersani a good deal less than Freud, however, for it was the latter who was regarded as the prime villain. Freud's theory of sexual pleasure, it seems, was intended, as Professor Bersani put it, "to coerce sexual pleasure into discourse," and Freud's whole work was characterized as an "event in the history of textuality." For this insight—which we may suppose to be crucial to the project of an emancipated subjectivity—Professor Bersani was warmly applauded. This was what the audience in the Grand Ballroom had come to hear, and it was pleased.

The next speaker—Christopher Butler of Christ Church College, Oxford—rather let the side down, however. He had more silly things to say about contemporary writing than we had ever before heard from a single speaker, and they weren't even very original, being derived (more or less) from Susan Sontag's old notion about an "erotics of art." They certainly had nothing to do with Lionel Trilling or "The Fate of Pleasure." It was a bad show. But the revival atmosphere heated up again with the next speaker—Jane Gallop, one of Michael Ryan's colleagues at Miami University—who delivered one of those hell-fire feminist sermons of a kind that we suppose must be common nowadays on American campuses. By now Trilling was utterly lost from view, and the project of emancipated subjectivity commanded the stage. We left before the end, anxious to procure a seat at the next session on our agenda—"The Future of Criticism"—which we suspected would also draw a crowd.

It did, too. And the first paper on the program—Herbert Lindenberger's thoughtful comparison of the old modes of literary history with the newer (or emancipated) type of literary history—was well worth hearing. Although we found much to disagree with in Professor Lindenberger's conclusions—he looked with particular pleasure on what he called "the social concerns of the new literary history"—his paper was nonetheless a remarkably clear and coherent analysis of the subject he had undertaken to elucidate. This was so rare a phenomenon at the MLA convention that we were tempted for a moment to regard the paper as more disinterested than in fact it was.

Then came Professor Edward Said, who had clearly not prepared anything for the occasion and began winging it. As the final speaker on the program was Jonathan Culler, the author of *On Deconstruction,* and we had already planned to attend the session on "De-

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construction and the Death of God" that very afternoon, we permitted ourselves a small, merciful respite and climbed over the many bodies which packed the aisles to regain in our freedom.

In the event, however, our heart wasn't in this session on "The Ghosts of Theology in Contemporary Literary Theory: Deconstructionism and the Fate of God." Listening to the first three—or was it four?—speakers, we found our sense of humor and our sense of horror getting the best of us. It was one thing for literary critics to speak nonsense about theology and such matters. But here was a professor of religion from Williams College—Mark Taylor—babbling on about Derrida as if he were a combination of Augustine and Aquinas. Suddenly, listening to Professor Taylor, we understood what the title of this session really meant: God was indeed dead, and maybe literature was too, and for Professor Taylor and his fellow panelists Derrida had taken their place. It was an appropriate moment at which to bring our attendance at these dismal sessions to a close.

There remained only one last duty to perform. We had been invited to one of the grand parties given—was it every evening?—by the MLA executive director, English Showalter, in his vast penthouse suite at the Hilton, and it was to this event that we went forth late on Thursday evening, seeking both information and refreshment. The information was easily enough acquired: attendance at this year's MLA convention was something in the vicinity of nine to ten thousand—approximately one-third of the association membership. For that reason, if for no other, the Centennial convention would long be remembered as a banner year for the MLA. It was only then that we began to appreciate an observation that had been made by John H. Fisher at the Centennial Forum on the opening evening of the convention. Until 1948, he said, the MLA was a learned society. Since then it had been—is it permitted to say *merely*?—a professional society. And how professional they are did look in the penthouse suite at the Hilton that evening!

Then, just as we were musing on these matters, we caught sight of something which put the whole thing—the whole protracted project of emancipated subjectivity and its relation to the "emancipated" MLA of the Eighties—into place. For there, holding court on a couch in the center of the penthouse's main salon, was the poet Allen Ginsberg, neatly attired in a tweed jacket and silk tie and volubly entertaining the professoriat with dark prophecies about the Reagan administration. What a perfect denouement to this MLA Centennial convention! The poet-prince of more than one generation of *révoltés,* veteran of how many projects of emancipated subjectivity now institutionalized in the college curriculum, resplendently poised as celebrity and guru at the seat of academic power! It was an image that we would not soon forget.

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The MLA centennial follies, Part II

Music in partibus infidelium

by Samuel Lipman

Poor music! Its usual process of distribution—from composer to performer to audience to academy—has always seemed bad enough, describing as it does the fall from divine inspiration to musicology. But now, as a short but boring session on Richard Wagner at the Modern Language Association's annual meeting made clear, another denouement is horribly possible: the supercession of a composer's music by his words.

This fate has befallen Wagner many times in the past. Many people might easily feel that the old devil—self-willed and arrogant—had it coming. All his life he took refuge from a giant-sized composer's block in a persistent and satisfying logorrhea. To some extent his ceaseless writing enabled him to get his compositional thoughts in order; to an even greater extent, one must suppose, it served to take his mind off his manifold financial and artistic problems. Whatever the reasons for his literary production, he wrote on, and the results were vast: the collected (and incomplete) edition of his works in English translation, published from 1892 to 1898, fills eight substantial volumes.

The MLA session was entitled "The Literary Resonance of Richard Wagner's Social and Aesthetic Theories at the Centennial of His Death." As listed in the program, the four papers that made up the session possessed if not much at least some interest. There were to be discussions of Wagner's three short stories, written out of his experiences in Paris around 1840; the relation between Wagner's theoretical writings and *Der Ring des Nibelungen*; the connection between Wagner and Baudelaire; and Wagner's and James Joyce's ideas about the nature of the artist. Here were broad, if not exactly untilled, topics. Given the menu, one could have imagined some tasty intellectual dishes. Not surprisingly, and not for the first time in scholarly activities, the best parts of these papers were their titles.

The first paper, by Joseph A. Kestner of the University of Tulsa, was called, in the MLA program, "Richard Wagner's 'Paris Trilogy' and the Evolution of the Short Story." I didn't hear anything at all about the evolution of the short story; indeed, no other literary figure was mentioned. Instead the speaker gave a highly selective and misleading account of Wagner's three stories, "A Pilgrimage to Beethoven," "A Happy Evening," and "An End in Paris." Absent from Mr. Kestner's description of the first story was the narrator's worship of Beethoven or the account of his own tortured life as a composer or of a powerful evocation in the story of a devil disguised as an English "milord." Absent from his description of the second story was any suggestion of the difference (brilliantly conveyed by Wagner's narrator) between Mozart's music and Beethoven's. And absent from his description of the third was any hint of the literary power of Wagner's tale of the failed com-

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poser-narrator's descent into poverty, self-delusion, and death from hunger.

Instead of conveying these obvious features of Wagner's stories, Mr. Kestner repeatedly made the point that the stories were important because of the way they presaged Wagner's later writings on the nature of opera and the relationship of the text to the music, and on nationalism. Of the thought that these stories had first to be looked at as art—because they *are* art—there was no trace.

Gerda Jordan, of the University of South Carolina, read a paper entitled "Theory into Practice: The Application of Three of Wagner's Notions in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*." It was never clear what these "notions" were. It was clear, however, that everything had to do with Wagner's idea of love, seen not as Christian in origin but rather as "human," beginning in sexual love and culminating in love for mankind. To illustrate how Wagner saw the love that began with Alberich's sportive chasing of the Rhine-maidens and ended with Brünnhilde's self-immolation, Professor Jordan referred to such eminent Wagnerian texts as "Opera and Drama" and his letters to his fellow revolutionary conspirator August Röckel.

The problem with Miss Jordan's presentation wasn't her assessment of Wagner's theoretical writings. Nor did one have to disagree with the speaker's final deadpan words: "Wagner's endless verbose prose—who needs it? Anyone who wants to understand his dramas." The problem was her inability to suggest that what lay beyond all the intellectual sludge was the great music and the powerful myth-taking that changed the course of music and influenced the very unfolding of European intellectual and social history in the twentieth century.

Elwood Hartman, of Washington State University in Pullman, presented the third paper, called in the program "Baudelaire and Wagner: Narcissistic Admiration." In the event, Professor Hartman spoke on "Narcissistic Admiration: Baudelaire and Wagner." I am afraid I did not come away very much enlightened about "narcissistic admiration," though there was a piquant detail: Baudelaire was diverted from committing suicide by his growing involvement in Wagner's music and by his anger at the way Tannhäuser was received at its scandalous Paris premiere in 1861. In general, Professor Hartman made these two artistic monsters sound like twin celebrity ships passing in the night, Baudelaire knowing little about music and little of Wagner's work (and in any case having written his own well before he had heard of Wagner), and Wagner keeping his distance from Baudelaire as if from someone who might soon ask for a favor.

The final presentation was at least ideologically trendy and therefore somewhat diverting. Vicki Mahaffey, from the University of Pennsylvania, had first planned to speak about Wagner, Joyce, and their ideas about the artist. Then she added Nietzsche and revolution to the brew. She agreed with Nietzsche's slating of Wagner for his indulgence in dreams, artificiality, morbidity, and the lies of art. She further cited Joyce's early interest in and possession of Wagner's works, including four scores of the operas. Professor Mahaffey seemed to approve of Joyce's rejection of Wagner's preference for illusion as against "full-blooded reality." Here was the core of Professor Mahaffey's message: unlike Nietzsche and Joyce, Wagner denied "his early healthy humanism." Thus Joyce, though he valued Wagner's theories, had no use for Wagner's later music. In what might stand as a motto for the entire session, Professor Mahaffey without comment cited Joyce as thinking Wagner's music was the least important part of his work.

All these ideas, and Professor Mahaffey's use of them, were fully anticipated in the past century. The discontinuities between Wagner's early and late music and between his theories and his art were the subject of extended discussion by no less than George Bernard Shaw (unmentioned in the MLA session) in *The Perfect Wagnerite* (1898). But the problem that bedeviled Shaw, as it has everyone who has a tooth for polemical radicalism, is that Wagner's greatest music—

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and his greatest drama—was written only after he gave up his revolutionary activities and, in *Tristan und Isolde, Die Meistersinger, Götterdämmerung,* and *Parsifal,* got down to writing music, not words.

After the presentations came the question period, for which plenty of time had been allowed. But there were only desultory questions from the thirty or so people who sat through it all, and the panelists refused the chairman's offer to say something to each other. There had been something terribly trivial in all the talk about what mere words can be. But the most important lesson was the revelation this palaver provided to a non-academic about just how "scholarly" papers are gotten up, even for presentation at the august MLA: paraphrase more or less accurately at least two texts by one or more well-known figures; point out the similarities or the lack of them; tie everything together with words like "theory," "understanding," and "humanism." With this recipe, even an academic can add to knowledge.

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The MLA centennial follies, Part III

Derrida's dullards, Woolf's womyn

by Bruce Bawer

Once every two or three years, between Christmas and New Year's Day, the sidewalks of New York are filled with bearded men in corduroy jackets and crewcutted women in polyester pantsuits loudly pronouncing the words *metataxis, logocentric, paralogic, non-referential,* and *hermeneutics* at one another. There can be no surer sign that the holiday is over and the MLA has descended.

Any organization capable of publishing an almost completely unreadable journal can be relied upon to mount an intolerably dreary annual conclave. The MLA did not disappoint. For dullness with a difference, or (as Derrida would put it) *differance,* few of the six hundred ninety-three sessions listed in this year's convention program could have topped number 47, "Representation and its Discontents: Philosophers, Poets, and the Stories They Tell," on Tuesday evening, December 27. At this gathering—which might better have been titled "Masters of the Obvious: Or, It Seems to Me I've Heard that Song Before"—three of the top-seeded players on the contemporary critical circuit served up everybody's favorite paraquestion, namely, whether words correspond in some way to reality. The fun twist this time around was that, although everybody was, in his own little way, a Derrida disciple, the correspondence view won two sets out of three. David L. Bromwich of Princeton began the proceedings with a talk entitled "Why Authors Don't Give Us Their Own World," in which he announced his discovery that many novels, stories, and poems describe something which bears an uncanny resemblance to real life. Of course, he said, there are many authors who present relatively unfamiliar worlds, worlds that seem to be completely of their own invention. With this in mind, Bromwich invited us to imagine a spectrum of writers, and to place at one extreme Kafka,

> an author of strange texts which compel our attention for reasons not plainly connected with our world. At the other extreme, Tolstoy, who has impressed critics from Arnold to Leavis as extraordinarily lifelike. As applied to him, the defense that he creates his own world would seem to be beside the point. But what if we complicate the scheme just a little and put Jane Austen on the Tolstoy side as a moderate case of lifelikeness, more matter than Tolstoy, that is, working with less transparent convention but still comfortably of our world; and on the Kafka side, as a more moderate case of strangeness, put Dickens. Now if we tried to run through this group, from Tolstoy to Austen to Dickens to Kafka, where would we draw the line and say that there the author had begun to give us his or her own world? It seems to me that if books have mattered to you, you can't in fact draw the line at all because no text is ever completely strange . . . .

Thus Bromwich was able to conclude that all literature is, at least in some sense, con-

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cerned with the real world. (What a relief!) He did not, however, take the seemingly necessary next step of renouncing a critical parasystem that sees words as meaningless and language as a game.

The same goes for Gerald Graff, who began his paper by telling us that the "crudity" of representational theories makes him uncomfortable. On the other hand, it occurred to him that there may be a question of

> whether we can renounce the correspondence view [i.e., the view that language has some connection with something else in the world] without renouncing intelligibility. It is certainly salutary to reject crudely positivistic picture theories or copy theories of correspondence. But it's another thing to reject the concept of correspondence itself. In the process of seeking to discard the correspondence view of language, philosophers like Rorty may have had to presuppose it. At least this point could be argued from within the Wittgensteinian framework used by Rorty and others to discredit the correspondence view. A good Wittgensteinian, I think, could argue that the power of language to correspond with a prior object world is already presupposed in the practice of our conventional language games. The assumption that our interpretations can be motivated by a prior object world, in other words, is a condition of engaging in discourse at all. [What a surprise!] I hope what I'm saying won't be confused with what Rorty would call a foundationalist philosophy of language, one which aims to find a ground for language outside it. Rorty is right in pointing out that we can't hope to ground language in a correspondence with something if we have to presuppose such correspondence in order to begin any such project of grounding . . . . What we can observe, however, is that the social practice of discourse involves believing that our utterances are independently motivated. It would make no sense to go on talking, much less engaging in philosophical and literary quarrels, if we didn't believe we could talk about objects to which talk refers.

And so on, into the night. The point, obviously, was not to say anything original or perceptive, or (God forbid!) both, but to repeat a single embarrassingly self-evident statement endlessly, in language so convoluted that many a listener might well have been fooled into believing that ideas were being exchanged. Graff's "conclusion" was that "the correspondence view of language is both philosophically uninteresting and inevitable." Which is to say, words do have a relation to reality, and it's a damn shame, because the whole idea of representation is so tacky; how much more intriguing words could be if they didn't mean anything. (If it's any consolation to Graff, I found a lot of his words to be meaningless.)

Richard Rorty came on last, with a talk entitled "Philosophy without Principles," and managed by the very swagger of his walk and the authority of his delivery to get across the idea that he was the old hand here, the dean of this sort of stuff, and that his two fellow panelists were neophytes. He was, indeed, the best of the three, in that the haze of banalities with which he obscured his lack of something to say was a lot thicker than theirs. His distinguishing marks were a refusal to accept the correspondence view at all, and the blunt self-importance with which he declared his allegiance to the pragmatic deconstructionist camp. Rorty was clearly not a believer in language as a means of communication, and perhaps he was right, at least about himself and his cronies. For there had been precious little communication here, in this paralogical paraparadise. There had only been circuitous language games, paragraphs of paraprose designed to hide a bankruptcy of meaning. With every disdainfully drawled word, and every supercilious question, the three panelists proclaimed the inferiority of all coherent systems of thought to their paramethod—while at the same time at least two of them recognized that words do mean something. This should have mattered, this implicit admission that the Derrida detour had reached a dead end, but it didn't. Nothing mattered. The whole exercise, in fact, was all so free of import, so stunningly illusory, that one

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almost expected Rorty, at evening's end, to quote Puck:

> If we shadows have offended,
> Think but this, and all is mended,
> That you have but slumber'd here
> While these visions did appear.
> And this weak and idle theme,
> No more yielding than a dream,
> Gentles, do not reprehend:
> If you pardon, we will mend . . . .

Two nights later, in session number 620, "Teaching Virginia Woolf in the University," the present custodians of Woolf were on the rampage. This is not to suggest that the tone of the session was disagreeable; on the contrary, whereas "Representation and its Discontents" was deadly serious, this session had the cheery, gung-ho, palsy-walsy verve of a television game show. There was, too, a decidedly religious aspect to the proceedings. Woolf was the local deity, her writings the scriptures, her chief prophet "the brilliant Jane Marcus" (not present). James McGavran, Jr., in his paper, "Teaching Virginia Woolf in the University: A First Dose for Unwilling Undergraduates," spoke of introducing students to Woolf "with high hopes of making converts." Marcia Folsom, in her paper, "Gallant Red Brick and Plain China: Teaching *A Room of One's Own* in 'Women in Literature,'" explained that she uses *A Room of One's Own* as a sort of class Bible, requiring that her students carry the book to class throughout the term and use it to interpret the other works studied in the course—novels by the Brontës, George Eliot, Jane Austen, Zora Neale Hurston, Margaret Drabble, Kate Chopin, and so forth. All four panelists quoted long passages, mostly feminist rah-rah material from *A Room of One's Own,* their voices all creepily tinged with reverence. Folsom even testified to the audience that after her students have been studying *A Room of One's Own* for several weeks, they begin to sense that "Virginia Woolf is speaking directly to them." (If she is, she is probably saying, "Please read one of my other books.")

The papers, as befitting texts at a religious ceremony, all took essentially the same line. To summarize the contribution of Folsom—editor of an anthology called *By Women* and author of critical studies of Doris Lessing and Sarah Orne Jewett—is to give a pretty good sense of the offerings of all four. Folsom's aim was to describe how she uses *A Room of One's Own* to show her students at Wheelock College how deprived they are. To be sure, her students don't realize at first that they are deprived, or that Woolf was. But, using *A Room of One's Own,* Folsom manages to raise their consciousnesses. She explained to her audience how bad off Wheelock is:

> The first American university was Harvard, founded in 1636 and described in the current college catalog as "the oldest, the richest, the freest of American universities." American colleges for women, like those around Boston, are about one hundred years old. Wellesley, the richest of women's colleges, was founded in 1870 . . . . Wheelock was founded in 1888 as a one-year school opened by Miss Lucy Wheelock, an American pioneer in the kindergarten movement . . . . The contrast between the noble old buildings of Harvard, the schools of law and business and medicine, the splendid gyms, the dozens of libraries, and staggering endowments, and Wheelock, where every tuition goes straight into operating budget, and the graduates who teach young children are lucky to earn twelve thousand dollars, is sufficiently instructive. The same contrast exists everywhere.

Worst of all, whereas the Harvard students (like those of Woolf's Oxbridge) get to eat off fine china, the poor girls at Wheelock must make do with plain china. (As a person of the male persuasion who spent four undergraduate years eating off plates made of paper, plastic, or styrofoam, I'm not too moved by this.) *A Room of One's Own,* Folsom continues, explains to her uninformed students the connection between "women's poverty" and childbearing, between childbearing and the suppression of the woman's

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voice, between patriarchy and fascism, etc. To Folsom—and to all of the panelists—Woolf is, above all, the author of *A Room of One's Own,* and *A Room of One's Own* is, above all, a piece of inspirational writing that

> offers valiant encouragement to all young Mary Carmichaels who may be daunted by headmasters with ornamental pots or bishops and deans and doctors and professors who say, "You can't do this!" "You shan't do that!" *"Ladies not admitted."* They are given spirit and hope when she addresses them directly: "Now is the time," she says, "for the poet who died young to live again, the poet who never wrote a word and was buried at the crossroads. She still lives in you and me and in many women who are not here tonight." The opportunity to live and write the poetry of Judith Shakespeare, the novels of Mary Carmichael and essays to and for the common reader is exactly what Virginia Woolf offers to our students, young women who live in battled red brick and eat off plain china.

What does all this have to do with Virginia Woolf? you may ask. Ask you may in the comfort of your favorite reading chair, but you would not have risen to ask it up there in the Madison Suite of the Hilton, any more than you would stand up at a revival meeting to present an argument for rational humanism. Spirit and hope for young women? Valiant encouragement to the gender-oppressed? O ye of little faith, that is Virginia Woolf.

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The Dostoevsky case

introduction by Joseph Frank

Dostoevsky's deposition was written shortly after his arrest on April 23, 1849, while he was being held in solitary confinement in the Peter and Paul Fortress in St. Petersburg. It is one of the most important documents that he ever wrote. Aside from his letters, there are very few firsthand statements by Dostoevsky about what he thought and believed. As he notes in his deposition, he was by nature a secretive person and rarely opened himself to others; all students of his work are aware of how difficult it is to make assertions about him that do not instantly have to be qualified. The existence of a document in which he sets out to tell the truth about himself—or, at least, to convince others that he was telling the truth—is thus of unique importance.

He had been arrested in the roundup of the Petrashevsky circle, a group which had met weekly for some years at the home of Mikhail Butashevich-Petrashevsky for social-political discussion. Petrashevsky was a young man of good family, educated at Pushkin's old school, the exclusive Alexander Lyceum, who had also acquired a law degree and worked as a translator for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But his real passion was for social reform, and he was known as an ardent Fourierist whose gatherings were suspected to be a center of political subversion. Those taken into custody were held incommunicado for five days after their arrest, and on April 28 they began to be called in for preliminary questioning by the commission set up to investigate the case. At the conclusion, each prisoner was asked to write, in the privacy of his cell, a more extended statement of his connection with the Petrashevsky circle and to give an account of it to the authorities. Dostoevsky's manuscript, dated May 6, was probably written in the two or three days immediately following his interrogation.

This document has long been known to scholars, and was first printed (in German, with many inaccuracies) in 1898, after an enterprising Austrian woman journalist, having managed to worm her way into the confidence of the usually vigilant Mme Dostoevsky, stole a copy and obtained a scoop for the *Neue Freie Presse* in Vienna. A more reliable original text was published in 1936 by N. F. Belchikov, the excellent Soviet Russian scholar who has specialized in this episode of Dostoevsky's life. Despite its availability, however, this crucial text has attracted very little other attention. It was felt that testimony produced under such conditions could not be taken at face value; and those writing about Dostoevsky probably did not relish the laborious task of weighing his every word to estimate its reliability. But while his assertions certainly have to be read with a good deal of caution, we now have sufficient outside information to allow a fairly accurate assessment of what to accept and what to question.

In general, Dostoevsky's tactic was to stick as close to the truth as possible. What

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he has to say about the Petrashevsky circle, for example, may seem, at first sight, an attempt to portray them as ridiculous and hence harmless. But in fact we know from other evidence that he made exactly the same sort of statements earlier in private conversation, where he was unquestionably expressing his genuine convictions. What he does not tell the Commission, though, is that, precisely because he could not take the Petrashevsky circle seriously, he had become a member of a small secret society operating *within* this larger grouping. Its purpose was to bring about a peasant revolution against serfdom. The existence of this smaller society was never discovered during Dostoevsky's lifetime. Only long after his death—in 1922—a document surfaced that finally uncovered the secret. It was an unsent letter written by the poet Apollon Maikov, one of Dostoevsky's lifelong friends, whom he had tried to recruit as a co-conspirator and then sworn to everlasting silence.

Even though Dostoevsky succeeded in covering his tracks in this way, he could not quite resist the temptation to toy with those who were trying to entrap him—exactly as Raskolnikov was to toy with Porfiry Petrovich, the investigating magistrate, seventeen years later in *Crime and Punishment*. Why, for instance, does he say (even underlining the words) that he had never spoken his mind at Petrashevsky's *"completely, revealing myself as I actually am?"* This was almost an invitation to his interrogators to ask him to explain himself. One can imagine him writing this sentence with some of Raskolnikov's contemptuous irony. Later, there is surely a concealed insult in his remark that, if any conspiracy had really existed in the Petrashevsky circle, it would hardly have been discussed at their open meetings, where strangers drifted in and out freely. Dostoevsky was here giving the commission a much-needed lesson in revolutionary tactics. And who can take seriously his assertion that the government—the government of Nicholas I—would be *displeased* and even *insulted* at the fear of speaking out manifested by its citizens? Surely there is a bitter sarcasm in *these* words!

In other contexts, though, Dostoevsky offers us valuable insights into his ideas and beliefs. He strongly defends his right to interest himself in European affairs and to express his opinions freely on issues of historical moment. He would always maintain this position, and considered it a terrible mistake that Czarism refused to allow the open debate with the radicals that would lead, he was convinced, to discrediting them once and for all. Of great interest, too, are his views on Russian history. The contrast he draws between Russia and the West also remained a constant of his thought. In Europe, revolutions were inevitable and even salutary; in Russia, where the relations between classes were not based on conquest, class war could be avoided if Czarism made the necessary concessions. (Dostoevsky here is drawing on the theories of the French liberal historian Augustin Thierry, then very influential, who traced the class war of European societies to the racial and ethnic antagonisms arising between the conquering ruling race and its alien inferiors.) His remarks foreshadow, and help to explain, his later enthusiastic support of Alexander II, who, in abolishing serfdom, had spared Russia the horrors of "a Russian revolt."

Since Dostoevsky's early work had suffered from the censorship, which had recently been severely tightened, his forceful attack on that institution is not unexpected. But under the circumstances, as several of his Soviet Russian commentators have remarked admiringly, it was an act of considerable political courage to defend himself by counter-attacking. He maintains his dignified and resolute behavior also in what he says about his relations with the famous critic Vissarion Belinsky, the most notorious radical spokesman of the time (the 1840s). The two had quarreled, as we see, and it would have been easy for Dostoevsky to have used this fact as a means of exculpation. But he honorably refuses to say a word against Belinsky's character (quite the contrary!) or to dwell on those *ideological* disagreements about which he wrote much later and which he could have used to depict himself in a much

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more favorable light. The only quarrel he dwells on is one about literature. Here he defines the same position he was later to assume against the Utilitarian aesthetics of the radicals of the 1860s, who went even farther in this direction than Belinsky.

One last point remains to be made, and this concerns Dostoevsky's attitude toward socialism. He argues, of course, that Fourierism (and this label may be taken to stand for all utopian systems) poses no political threat; by implication, those who are partisans of such theories should not be considered subversives. But the eloquent terms in which he describes Fourierism reveal its own attraction for him. He himself responds emotively to the image of a world that "seduces the heart by the love for humanity." It was of this sort of world that he continued to dream, and he believed it could be created only in Russia. Not under the influence of socialism, though, but as a result of the Christian spirit, which was the age-old inalienable heritage of the Russian people, whose own sufferings had made them peculiarly susceptible to the message of the suffering and humiliated Christ.

But while sympathetic to the moral inspiration of socialism, Dostoevsky even then considered all the socialist systems as artificial and hence impractical even for the West. In Russia, where socialism actually existed as a reality in the institutions of the Russian peasantry (we know that he believed this from other sources), it was simply ludicrous to import them. And Dostoevsky's depiction of Petrashevsky as harmless, and far more comic than terrifying, is exactly how he would continue to depict utopian socialists later—in the second part of *Notes from Underground*, in the character of Lebezyiatnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, and even in the most scathing of his anti-radical novels, *The Devils*.

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Statement on the Petrashevsky Affair

by Feodor Dostoevsky

translated and annotated by Liza A. Knapp

I have been told to relate all that I know about Petrashevsky and the people who attended the Friday gatherings at his place; that is, I have been told to give testimony about both the facts and my personal opinions of these facts. Judging from my first interrogation, I conclude that a detailed response to the following items is required of me:

1. What is Petrashevsky like as a man, in general, and as a political figure, in particular?

2. What took place at the gatherings at Petrashevsky's that I attended and what opinions do I have of those gatherings?

3. Did the Petrashevsky group not have some hidden, clandestine purpose? Is Petrashevsky personally a dangerous man, and to what extent does he pose a threat to society?

I have never been on very close terms with Petrashevsky, although I attended his Friday gatherings and he, in turn, would call on me. Ours was an acquaintance which I didn't prize very highly since we lacked common ground both in our personalities and in many of our views. And this is why I maintained relations with him only to the extent required by courtesy—that is, I visited him from month to month and sometimes even less. I had no reason to break off relations with him entirely. And besides, it was sometimes interesting for me to attend his Friday gatherings.

I was always struck by the great eccentricity and peculiarity of Petrashevsky's behavior. As a matter of fact, I owe our acquaintance to the fact that his peculiar behavior piqued my curiosity from the very first time I saw him. However, I seldom went to his place. At times, six months would elapse without my going there. During last winter, from September on, I wasn't at his place more than eight times. We have never been on close terms with each other and I think that during the whole time that we've been acquainted we have never been left alone with each other, tête-à-tête, for more than half an hour. I definitely noticed that when he would stop by my place it was as if he were performing an act of courtesy, whereas, for instance, it would be painful for him to carry on a lengthy conversation with me. And I felt the same way; for, I repeat, we had little common ground, either in our ideas or in our personalities. We avoided getting involved in lengthy discussions with each other, because from the tenth word we would have started to quarrel, and both of us were fed up with that. It seems to me that our respective attitudes toward each other were the same. At any rate, I know that I very often went to his Friday gatherings not so much for his sake or for the sake of the gatherings themselves as for the sake of seeing certain people whom I knew and liked but saw only extremely rarely. But, in any event, I've always respected Petrashevsky as an honest and noble man.

Many people—almost all who know Petra-

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shevsky or have heard of him—talk about his eccentricities and peculiarities, and they even pass judgment on him on this basis. I've heard it said several times that Petrashevsky has more brains than sense. To be sure, it would be quite difficult to account for much of his peculiar behavior. Often, when you run into him on the street and ask where he's going and why, he gives you some peculiar answer, describes some very peculiar plan that he's en route to carry out, and leaves you at a loss as to what to make of the plan and of Petrashevsky himself. At times he will go to such pains over some inconsequential matter that you'd think his whole fortune depended on it. At other times, he'll be rushing off somewhere for half an hour in order to wrap up some "trifling matter," whereas wrapping up that "trifling matter" would actually take two years. He is a man who is forever fussing and moving about; he is forever busy with something. He reads a lot; he admires Fourier's system and has studied it in detail.[1] In addition, he's very involved in studying law. This is all I know about him as a private person, on the basis of data sorely lacking for a completely accurate judgment of someone's character, for, I once again repeat, I was never on very close terms with him.

It would be hard to say whether Petrashevsky (regarded as a political figure) has any particular ideological system of his own or some particular point of view on political events. As far as I could tell, his views were consistent only in regard to one system; and it was not even his own but that of Fourier. It seems to me that Fourier is actually what keeps him from looking at things in an original way. Yet I can quite definitely say that Petrashevsky is quite far from believing in the possibility of an immediate application of Fourier's system to our social reality. Of that I have always been convinced.

The group that gathered at Petrashevsky's on Fridays consisted almost entirely of his close friends and old acquaintances; at least, that was my impression. Of course, new faces would appear, but, as far as I could tell, this happened rather rarely. Some of the others I know simply because I happened to talk with them three or four times a year; and, finally, many of Petrashevsky's guests I hardly know at all, even though I've been seeing them at the Friday gatherings for as much as a year or two by now. But, even though I don't know all the people well, I have lent an ear to their various opinions. By and large, these opinions were all discordant; one would contradict the other. I met with no unity whatsoever in the Petrashevsky group, no direction, no common cause. One can positively say that three among them could not be found who would all agree to some point on any given subject. Hence the endless arguments among one another. I even took part in a few of these arguments myself.

But before I tell on what account I entered into these arguments and on what specific subjects I spoke, I will say a few words about the charges leveled against me. Essentially, to this very moment I still don't know what the charges against me are. I was simply informed that I took part in the general discussions at Petrashevsky's, that I spoke *like a freethinker,* and, finally, that I had read aloud the literary article "Belinsky's Correspondence with Gogol." I will say in all sincerity that there has been nothing harder for me in all the world than defining the word: *freethinker, liberal.* What is meant by this word? A person who speaks unlawfully? But I've seen people for whom admitting to having a headache amounts to acting unlawfully, and I know that there are likewise others who are ready to shout from the rooftops whatever

1 François Charles Marie Fourier (1772-1837) was a French utopian socialist who dreamed of organizing mankind into harmonious collectives inhabiting carefully designed "phalansteries." Fourierism aimed at developing human nature fully and freely by replacing individualism with cooperation and by taking advantage of innate human tendencies. (For example, the task of collecting garbage in the phalansteries was to be assigned to children, since they, according to Fourier, feel no repugnance for the task and, on the contrary, enjoy it.)

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their tongue is capable of cranking out. Who has seen the inside of my soul? Who has determined the degree of the perfidy, damage, and rebellion that I'm being charged with? On what scale was this determination made? Perhaps the charges are based on a few remarks I made at Petrashevsky's? I spoke there three times: twice about *literature* and once on a subject totally unrelated to politics, on *individuality* and *human egoism*. I can't recall that there was anything political or freethinking in my remarks. I can't recall that at Petrashevsky's I ever spoke my mind *completely, revealing myself as I actually am*. But I know myself, and if the charge is based on some remarks that had been jotted down on a scrap of paper and were seized during a raid, well, I'm not afraid of even such a charge, although such a charge is the most dangerous kind, there being nothing more damaging, incoherent, and unjust than some remarks taken from God knows where relating to God knows what, overheard hastily, understood hastily—or more often than not completely misunderstood—and jotted down hastily. But I repeat: I know myself and am not afraid of even such a charge.

Yes, if *seeking the better* is liberalism, *freethinking*, then, in this sense, perhaps, I am a freethinker. I am a freethinker in the very same sense in which one can call any man a freethinker who in the depths of his heart feels that he has the right to be a citizen, feels that he has the right to seek the welfare of his country, because in his heart he finds both love for his country and the knowledge that he has never in any way done it harm. But did this *seeking the better* address the realms of the possible or of the impossible? Let it be proven that I ever sought changes and upheavals in a violent, revolutionary way, or that my seeking ever aroused bile and hatred! But I'm not afraid of the evidence; for no allegation in the world will take anything away from me or add anything to me; no allegation can cause me to be other than I actually am. Did my freethinking manifest itself in the fact that I spoke aloud about things about which others consider it their duty to be quiet—not because they want to avoid saying something against the government (this wouldn't even cross their minds) but because, in their opinion, the subject is one about which it is unbecoming to talk out loud? Was this my "freethinking"? I've always even taken offense at this fear of speaking out, which is more likely to be an insult to the government than pleasing to it. And, in fact, why should the righteous man be fearful for himself and what he says? For this is tantamount to supposing that the laws do not sufficiently protect the individual and that one can be ruined by mere words, by careless phrases. But why is it that we ourselves have so conditioned everyone to regard as an eccentric act any remarks that in any way resemble an opinion and are made openly and out loud! My feeling is that if we all were more frank with the government we ourselves would be much better off. It has always grieved me to see how we are all as if instinctively fearful of something, to see how when we gather together in a crowd in some public place we eye each other mistrustfully, gloweringly, cast sidewise glances and act suspicious of people. Or else how when someone starts to talk, say, about politics, he is sure to start to speak in a whisper and with the most secretive look, even though the notion of a republic may be as far from his head as France. People will say: "Certainly, it's to our advantage that in Russia we don't shout everything from the rooftops." Of course, this cannot be denied; and yet excessive suppression and excessive fear give our everyday life a somber coloring, presenting everything in a joyless, forbidding light; and, what's most distressing of all, this coloring is false; for all this fear is groundless and pointless (of this I am convinced), all these apprehensions are nothing more than our invention, and we ourselves only pointlessly alarm the government with our secretiveness and mistrustfulness. And this strained state of affairs often results in much ado about nothing. The most ordinary remarks, spoken out loud, gain inordinate significance, and the event itself—the fact that the remarks were ever made—by reason

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of its perceived eccentricity, often takes on colossal proportions and is bound to be attributed to extraneous (extraordinary) causes rather than to the actual (ordinary) ones. I have always been convinced that a conscious belief is better and stronger than an unconscious one that is unstable, wavering, ready to topple over at the first wind to blow. Consciousness is something that you can't hatch or develop in silence. It's we ourselves who try to avoid universalization; we split up into groups or else harden our hearts in isolation. And who's to blame for this state of affairs? We ourselves and nobody else—so I've always thought.

Although by way of example I did mention our discussions on social issues, I myself am actually far from being a loudmouth, as anyone who knows me will corroborate. I don't even like speaking in public and at length, even with friends, of which I have few, and especially at social gatherings, where I have the reputation of being a quiet, taciturn, unsociable man. I have a very small circle of acquaintances. Half my time is taken up by the work that supports me; the other half is regularly taken up by illness and the hypochondriacal attacks that I've been suffering for already three years now. There's scarcely any time left for reading and finding out what's going on in the world. Very little time is left for friends and acquaintances. And so, if I wrote just now against the system of universal and seemingly systematic suppression and secretiveness, I did so because I wanted to voice my conviction and not at all in order to defend myself.

But what are the charges against me anyway? That I spoke about politics, the West, censorship, and so on? But who in our day has not spoken and thought about these issues? Why was I educated, why has a desire for knowledge been aroused in me by learning if I don't have the right to voice my personal opinion or disagree with that opinion which retains its authority no matter what? In the West a terrifying spectacle is taking place, an unprecedented drama is being played out. The age-old order of things is cracking and shattering. At every moment the most fundamental principles of society threaten to collapse, sweeping the whole nation with them as they fall. Every day, thirty-six million people risk all their future, their property, their own existence and that of their children, gambling on it all as if they were at a card game! How could such a sight not attract attention and stimulate curiosity and a desire for knowledge, how could it not harrow one's soul? This is the very same land that gave us learning, education, and European civilization; such a spectacle serves as a lesson! It is, after all, history, and history teaches us about the future. Given these circumstances, is it conceivable that we will be prosecuted—we who received a certain degree of education, in whom was aroused a hunger for knowledge and learning—is it conceivable that we will be prosecuted for having had whatever curiosity it takes to talk occasionally about the West, about political events, to read current books, to keep an eye on the developments in the West and even to study them as much as opportunity allows?

Is it conceivable that I will be prosecuted for paying rather serious attention to the crisis that is causing unfortunate France to wince and nearly be cast asunder, and for considering, perhaps, this crisis to be historically necessary in the life of that nation, as a transitional stage (who can determine this at present?) that eventually will result in a better time? My freethinking about the West and about revolution never went beyond this opinion or similar ideas. And if I did talk about the upheaval in France, if I did take the liberty to form an opinion on current events, does it follow that I am a freethinker, that I am of republican persuasion, that I am an opponent of the autocracy, that I am trying to undermine it? Impossible! For me there never was anything more absurd than the idea of republican rule in Russia. My views on this score are quite familiar to all who know me. Ultimately, such an accusation would run counter to all my beliefs and to my education. Perhaps I will go a bit further in trying to explain the revolution in the West and the *historical necessity* of the

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current crisis there. For many centuries, for more than a millennium, a very persistent struggle has dragged on there between society and the authority that has imposed itself onto an alien civilization by means of conquest, violence, and oppression.

And what about here in Russia? Our country didn't take shape along Western lines! We have historical examples in front of us: 1) the fall of Russia to the Tatars as a result of the weakening and disintegration of authority; 2) the disgrace of the Novgorod republic—a republic tried out for several centuries on Slavic soil; and, finally, 3) the twice-told salvation of Russia, thanks solely to the strengthening of authority, the strengthening of the autocracy: Russia saved the first time from the Tatars and the second time during the reforms of Peter the Great, when her warm, childlike faith in her great helmsman—and nothing else—enabled her to survive such a drastic transition to a new life. And, for that matter, who here in Russia even thinks about a republic? And if indeed reforms do lie in store, it will be clear as day even for those who seek them that these reforms must stem from the authority itself, which will have to be even further strengthened while the reforms take place; for otherwise the whole matter would have to take place by revolutionary means. I doubt that a champion of a Russian revolt could be found in Russia. Examples are known and remembered to this day, although they took place long ago. In conclusion, I call to mind remarks of mine that I have made more than once: from Peter the Great on, all that has been good in Russia has invariably originated from above, from the throne, whereas to this day nothing other than obstinacy and ignorance has manifested itself from below. This opinion of mine is quite familiar to many of the people who know me.

I spoke about censorship, about its inordinate severity in our time, and I lamented this fact; for I felt that some misunderstanding had taken place, resulting in a strained state of affairs that was hard on literature. It saddened me that in our day the calling of the writer has been debased by some dark suspicion and that, from the outset, even before he has written anything, the writer is regarded by the censors as if he were some natural enemy of the state, and they set to picking apart his manuscript with unmistakable prejudice. It saddened me when I heard that a work had been prohibited not because it was found to contain anything that was considered liberal, freethinking, or counter to morality, but simply because the story or novel had too unhappy an ending, because it presented too somber a picture, even if the picture didn't accuse anyone or insinuate anything about anyone in society, and even if the tragedy resulted from incidental and external factors.

Let them pick apart everything that I've written, published and unpublished, let them examine the manuscripts of my already published works, and they will see what they were like before being submitted to the censorship—let them try to find so much as a single word counter to morality or to the established order of things. Yet, as a matter of fact, I myself have been the victim of such a prohibition, simply because the picture was painted in too somber colors. But if only the censors knew what a somber situation the author of the prohibited work confronted! He was faced with the necessity of going worse than without bread for three whole months since the work provided my means for survival. And, on top of everything, in the midst of the deprivation, grief, and near despair (for, financial considerations aside, it was painful to the brink of despair to see one's creation, which one loved—that had cost one labor, health and one's best spiritual energy—prohibited because of a *misunderstanding,* because of *suspicion*), so then, on top of everything, in the midst of deprivation, grief, and despair, one still has to find enough easy, cheerful hours in which to produce a new literary work in colors that would be light, rosy, and pleasing. And one has no choice but to write such things, since one has to exist. If I spoke, if I complained a little (oh, but I complained so very little!), does this mean that I engaged in freethinking? And what was I complaining

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about? About a misunderstanding. Namely: I was beating my brains out trying to prove that every writer is suspect in advance, that he is regarded with distrust and wariness, and I blamed the writers themselves for not wanting on their own to take the initiative in seeking a resolution for this baneful misunderstanding. Baneful, because such a strained situation threatens the very existence of literature.

Whole art forms will have to disappear: already satire and tragedy can no longer exist. Given the severity of today's censorship, writers such as Griboedov, Fonvizin, and even Pushkin can no longer exist.[2] Satire ridicules vice, more often than not vice parading under the guise of virtue. But nowadays how can there be any kind of mockery whatsoever? The censor sees insinuations in everything; he suspects that there's some personage depicted, that there's gall, that the author is insinuating something about some concrete person or some situation. I myself —having cast off my sadness—would very often chuckle over what the censor found *to be a threat to society* and unsuitable for publication in my manuscripts or in other people's. I laughed because nowadays such suspicions wouldn't cross the mind of anybody but a censor. In the most innocent, clean sentence the most criminal of thoughts is suspected, the censor obviously pursuing it with great intellectual exertion as an eternal, immutable idea that cannot leave his head, that he himself, shaken by fear and suspicion, created, that he himself incarnated in his imagination, that he himself colored with fantastic, terrifying colors, ultimately destroying his phantom together with the innocent cause of his fear—the writer's sinless original sentence. As if simply by hiding vice and the somber side of life one hides from the reader the fact that vice and the somber side of life exist on earth! No, an author will not succeed in hiding the somber side by systematically omitting it from the reader's eyes, but rather he will only make his readers suspect him of insincerity and untruthfulness. For that matter, is it possible to depict things using only light colors? How can the light part of a picture be perceptible without the somber? Can a picture exist without both light and shadow together? If we have a conception of what light is, it is only because such a thing as shadow exists. We're told: "depict nothing but valor and virtue." But it's impossible to identify virtue without vice; the very concepts of *good* and *evil* have resulted from the fact that good and evil have always coexisted, side by side. Just imagine what would happen if I were to present ignorance, vice, abuse, arrogance, violence! The censor would immediately be suspicious of me and think that I was speaking about everything in general without exception. I'm not championing the cause of the depiction of vice and the somber side of life! Neither the one nor the other is dear to me. I speak simply in the interest of art.

Observing, having finally become convinced, that a misunderstanding had arisen between literature and censorship (and a misunderstanding and nothing else), I lamented, I prayed that this sorry misunderstanding would soon come to an end; because I love literature and can't not care about it; because I know that literature is one of the reflections of the life of a nation, that it is a mirror of society. Together with education and civilization, new concepts arise that require a Russian definition and name in order to be passed on to the people; for, under the present circumstances, the task of naming them doesn't fall to the people, since civilization comes not from them but from above; the concepts can be named only by the society that received civilization before the people, that is, the upper layer of society, the class already prepared for the reception of these ideas. Who then formulates the new ideas in such a form that the people will be able to grasp them—who then

2 Alexander Griboedov (1795-1829) and Denis Fonvizin (1745-1792) were major Russian playwrights known for their social satire. Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) was in Dostoevsky's time the best-known and best-loved Russian author. He wrote poetry, prose, and drama.

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if not literature? Peter the Great's reform would not have been so easily accepted by a people that didn't even understand what was required of them. And what was the Russian language like at the time of Peter the Great? It was half Russian and half German, because half of German life, German ideas, and German customs were grafted onto Russian life. But the Russian people don't speak German, and the appearance of Lomonosov immediately after Peter the Great was not a chance occurrence.[3] Without literature, there can be no society; but I observed that literature was declining and, for the tenth time, I repeat, the misunderstanding that's arisen between literature and the censors tormented me, tortured me. I spoke, but I spoke only about harmony, about an accord, about the obliteration of a misunderstanding. I did not ignite anyone around me *because I had faith.* And besides, I spoke only with my closest friends, with my fellow writers. Is this harmful freethinking?

I am being charged for reading the article "Belinsky's Correspondence with Gogol" at one of the gatherings at Petrashevsky's.[4] True, I did read the article, but would the person who informed on me be able to say to which of the correspondents I was more partial? Let him try to recall whether there was in my judgments (from which I refrained)—or even in the intonation of my voice, or in my posture during the reading—anything that could in any way demonstrate my partiality to one party in the correspondence over the other? Of course, he can't say that there was. Belinsky's letter is written in too strange a way to evoke a sympathetic response. Rebukes repel the heart rather than attract it, and the whole letter is crammed with rebukes and written with gall. Ultimately, the whole article is a model of lack of substantiation—a fault that Belinsky could never get rid of in his critical articles and that became more pronounced as his mental and physical powers dwindled in the course of his illness. These letters were written in the last year of his life, during his stay abroad. For a while I was on rather close terms with Belinsky. As a man, he was an outstanding human being. But the illness that led him to his grave even managed to crush the human being in him. It embittered and hardened his soul and flooded his heart with gall. His imagination, deranged and strained, magnified everything so that it would take on gigantic dimensions and show him things that he alone was capable of seeing. Faults and vices suddenly developed that there had been no trace of when he was a healthy man. Incidentally, he developed a sense of vanity that made him extremely prickly and touchy. At the journal which officially listed him as a contributor but for which because of his illness he worked only very little the editors tied his hands and wouldn't assign him very important articles. This hurt him. And such was his state of mind when he wrote his letter to Gogol.

My quarrel and final break with Belinsky in the last year of his life are no secret to a lot of people in the literary world. The cause of our falling out is likewise common knowledge: it happened over ideas about literature and the direction literature should take. My view was radically opposed to Belinsky's view. I reproached him for striving to give literature a function that was limited and unworthy of it, that reduced it to mere description (if I may so express myself) of *nothing more than newspaper facts* or scandalous occurrences. Specifically, I protested

3 Mikhail Lomonosov (1711-1765), the scientist, poet, and philologist, was a key figure in Russia's newly founded Academy of Sciences. He was also instrumental in instituting linguistic reforms that standardized literary Russian and thereby paved the way for the emergence of Russian literature.

4 In response to Nikolai Gogol's *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends,* the radical critic Vissarion Belinsky wrote a letter attacking Gogol for not using his position as a writer to advocate social reform, such as the abolition of serfdom. Gogol maintained that literature should enlighten people spiritually and champion Russian Orthodoxy rather than promote political causes.

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that one doesn't win anybody over with gall and that, on the contrary, one merely bores each and every one to death by seizing on every Tom, Dick, and Harry in the street, buttonholing every passerby and starting to preach to him by force and to lecture him until he's at his wit's end. Belinsky lost his temper with me and, eventually, our coolness developed into a formal quarrel, the result being that in the end we didn't see each other at all during the last year of his life. I had wanted to read those letters for a long time. In my eyes, this correspondence is a rather remarkable literary monument. Both Belinsky and Gogol are very remarkable people. Their mutual relations are extremely fascinating, all the more so for me since I knew Belinsky. Petrashevsky happened to catch sight of the letters in my possession and asked: "What's that?"; and I, not having the time to show him the letters then and there, promised to bring them to his place on Friday. I myself had volunteered and was then naturally obligated to keep my word. I read the article as neither more nor less than a literary monument, firmly convinced that it couldn't lead anyone into temptation, even though it wasn't totally devoid of a certain literary merit. As for myself, I was literally not in agreement with a single of the exaggerations found therein.

Now I ask that the following circumstances be taken into account: Would I have gotten it into my head to read a piece by somebody with whom I had broken precisely over ideas and nothing else (this is no secret; it's a known fact to many) and, what's more, a piece written during his sickness, while he was in a state of mental and spiritual disorder—would I have gotten the notion into my head of reading this piece, presenting it as a model, as a formula that ought to be followed? I've only now realized that I made a mistake and that I ought not to have read the article out loud; but at that time it didn't even dawn on me that I shouldn't read it, for I didn't have the slightest inkling of possible charges against me, I didn't have the slightest inkling that I was doing anything sinful. Out of respect for someone already dead, who had been remarkable in his time, and whom many revere because of several articles on the aesthetics of literature written with a truly great understanding of literary matters, and also out of a sensitivity resulting from our ideological quarrel, which was a fact known to many—for these reasons, I read the whole correspondence, restraining myself from making any comment and maintaining utter impartiality.

I mentioned that I spoke in public about politics, censorship, and so forth. But I was only groundlessly incriminating myself. I just felt like having a chance to express my train of thought. But never did I speak about these things at Petrashevsky's. I spoke at his place only three times or, more accurately, twice. Once about *literature* in connection with an argument with Petrashevsky over Krylov,[5] and the other time about *individuality* and *egoism.* On the whole, I'm not a very talkative person and I don't like speaking out when there are people present that I don't know. My pattern of thought and my true nature are known only to very few of my friends. I avoid big arguments and prefer to give in simply in order to be left alone. But I was provoked to this literary argument, the subject of which, on my part, was the notion that art has no need of direction, that it is an end unto itself, that an author ought only to trouble himself with achieving artistic merit and the idea will come on its own; for artistic merit presupposes an idea. *In a word, it's obvious that this approach is diametrically opposed to the journalistic and incendiary.* It's also been obvious to many that this has been my approach for several years. What's more, everybody at Petrashevsky's heard our quarrel; everybody can corroborate what I've said. The upshot was that it turned out that Petrashevsky and I shared the same convictions about literature but had not under-

5 Ivan Krylov (1769-1844), a major Russian fabulist, was known for his ear for Russian. The morals of his fables are of a down-to-earth, conservative nature. Dostoevsky defended Krylov against Petrashevsky's attempts to disparage his importance to Russian literature.

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stood each other. Everybody also heard this denouement. And I noticed eventually that the whole argument had stemmed partly from vanity, because I had once doubted whether Petrashevsky had any coherent knowledge on the subject. And as for what concerns the second topic: about *individuality* and *egoism,* well I wanted to demonstrate that among us there is more *ambitiousness* than true human dignity, that we ourselves are sinking into self-disparagement, into disintegration of personality as a result of petty vanity, egoism, and the futility of our activities. This topic is strictly psychological.

I've said that among the group that gathered at Petrashevsky's there wasn't the slightest coherence, the slightest unity either in thought or in outlook. It seemed to be one big argument that had begun at one point in order never to end. It was in the name of that argument that the group gathered—for the sake of arguing and arguing things into the ground; after almost every time people would disperse in order to renew the argument the next time with renewed energy, feeling that not even one tenth of what they wanted to say had been said yet. Without arguments, things would have been incredibly dull at Petrashevsky's, because arguments and disagreements were all that was capable of uniting these diverse people. The talk was about everything and nothing in particular; and the talk was the same as in any group that has gotten together casually. I am convinced of this. And if I occasionally took part in the arguments at Petrashevsky's, if I went to his place and wasn't alarmed when I heard some heated remarks, well then it was because I was totally convinced (and remain convinced to this very day) that what went on there was of a domestic nature, among a circle of Petrashevsky's mutual acquaintances and friends, and not of a public nature. Such was actually the case, and if presently such inordinate attention is being directed at what went on at Petrashevsky's, it seems to me that this has been due to Petrashevsky's being widely known to almost all of Petersburg for his peculiarities and eccentricities. And so, for this very same reason, his gatherings have likewise become widely known; and I know for a fact that all the talk has exaggerated their significance, even though the talk of the town contained more mockery of Petrashevsky's gatherings than alarm about them. The fact that the discussion there was sometimes rather frank (but it was always in the form of a misgiving, and what was said always developed into an argument) didn't disturb me. Because, in my opinion, it's better for some fiery paradox, some misgiving to be aired in front of others (of course, not at the marketplace but in a circle of friends) rather than remaining locked inside a person without outlet, only to grow hard and become petrified in his soul. A common argument is more useful than isolation. The truth always rises to the surface, and common sense carries the day. This is how I looked on those meetings, and in this spirit I would sometimes go to Petrashevsky's. And experience proved me right. Because, for example, people finally stopped talking about Fourierism since Fourierism had been showered with ridicule from all sides, even as a doctrine. And if someone at Petrashevsky's were to have gotten it into his head to broach the subject of the application of Fourier's system to our social reality, people right then and there would have laughed in his face, without the slightest beating around the bush. I say this because I'm utterly convinced of the truth of what I say.

In answer to the question as to whether the Petrashevsky group had some hidden, clandestine purpose, it can definitely be said that, bearing in mind all the difference of opinion, all the confusion of ideas, characters, personalities, professions, all the arguments, going to the brink of hostility but still remaining nothing more than arguments—bearing all that in mind and taking it all into account, it can definitely be said that it would have been out of the question for there to have been some hidden, clandestine purpose in all that chaos. There was not even a shadow of unity and could not have been till kingdom come. And although I

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didn't know everybody in Petrashevsky's group or everything about it, still, judging from what I saw, I can say for a fact that I'm not mistaken.

Now I have to answer the final question, the answer to which will constitute the conclusion of my vindication. Namely: Is Petrashevsky personally a dangerous man, and to what extent does he pose a threat to society? When this question was put to me the first time I was not able to give a direct answer. Before considering this question, I had to resolve for myself a whole series of questions and misgivings that immediately cropped up in my mind, that I was unable to resolve right there on the spot, that required a certain amount of thought; and, for this reason, I stood there not knowing what to answer. Now, having pondered everything, I will present both my preliminary thoughts and, finally, the answer to the question I had been asked, an answer I came to as a result of those thoughts. First, if I was asked whether Petrashevsky poses a threat to society, I take it to mean primarily as a Fourierist, as a follower and promoter of Fourier's doctrine. I was shown a notebook covered with small writing and I was told that I probably would recognize the handwriting. I am not familiar with Petrashevsky's hand; we never corresponded, and I hadn't the slightest idea that he would launch himself into authorship. And I say this in all earnestness. This is why I know absolutely nothing about Petrashevsky as a Fourierist propagator. All that I'm familiar with are his scholarly views. And even so, he and I seldom, almost never, engaged in a scholarly discussion of Fourier, for our discussion would have immediately turned into an argument. He knew this perfectly well. Petrashevsky never imparted to me any plans or instructions and I certainly don't know whether or not he had any. What's more, even if he had some, which I absolutely don't know, he, not being at all on close terms with me and in general not full of goodwill, would in all likelihood (of this I'm sure) have hidden everything from me and wouldn't have made known a single word to me. And, as far as I'm concerned, I never had the slightest desire to be a party to his secrets. And so I can't say a thing about Petrashevsky as a Fourierist except from a strictly scholarly point of view.

I know that Petrashevsky has great respect for Fourier's system. As a Fourierist, of course, he cannot help but want people to agree with him. But I was asked: Is he making disciples? *Is he not luring teachers from various educational institutions in order, having converted them, to work through them to spread Fourierism among the young?* My answer: I can give absolutely no response to this question because I don't have sufficient data since I don't know Petrashevsky's secrets. I've been told that among Petrashevsky's acquaintances there are some teachers, for example, Toll. But I don't know Toll at all and found out only recently that he was a teacher. As for Yastrzhembsky, I only found out that he was a teacher when he spoke about political economy. I don't know any other teachers. Being not only not on close terms but even on distant terms with Toll, I know neither the history of his acquaintance with Petrashevsky nor when they got to know each other—in a word, I hadn't even the slightest curiosity about these things. As far as Yastrzhembsky is concerned, I had the opportunity to learn his views on economics when I happened to hear him speak twice. As far as I could tell, he is an economist of the newest school and tolerates socialism only to the extent that the most strict professors of social science tolerate it, for socialism, for its part, has been of great benefit to social science thanks to its critical analysis and statistical aspect. Quite simply, I gather that Yastrzhembsky is far from being a Fourierist and that he has nothing to learn from Petrashevsky. But I add that I don't know Yastrzhembsky personally at all. I've *never* engaged in conversation with him and apparently he regards me in a similar fashion. I don't know the full scope of his ideas, just as he doesn't know mine. Thus I can only judge Petrashevsky as a promoter of doctrine on the basis of guesses, on the basis of conjectures.

But on the basis of guesses I can say noth-

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ing. I know that my deposition will not be taken as the definitive or principal word, but nevertheless it does remain a deposition. And what if I am mistaken? This mistake will lie on my conscience. I was shown a manuscript about whose existence I had no previous knowledge. I read one sentence of this manuscript. In this sentence was expressed an impassioned desire for the immediate triumph of Fourier's system. If the whole manuscript is in this same vein, if Petrashevsky acknowledged it as his, then, obviously, he did desire the propagation of Fourier's system. But whether up until now he has actually taken any measures—I don't know. I'm not privy to his secrets and I think that in the final analysis I can be trusted. No one can prove that Petrashevsky and I were ever on very close terms. I went to his place on Fridays as an acquaintance and nothing more. I don't know any of his plans and that was the first time I saw the manuscript whose contents, other than one sentence, are completely unknown to me. And so, as to whether or not he's taken any measures, I can't say. But let me take the liberty of setting forth some of my own personal thoughts, ones that make up a most deep conviction that I have been pondering a long time, thoughts which occurred to me previously in the same way as now and because of which, when first asked about Petrashevsky's guilt, I couldn't give a definitive answer. I'm aware of the importance in the eyes of Petrashevsky's judges of evidence such as books, manuscripts, and conversations jotted down in fragments. But since I have been asked about Petrashevsky, let me take the liberty of setting forth my opinion on his whole case.

Petrashevsky believes in Fourier. Fourierism is a peaceful system; it enchants the soul with its elegance, it seduces the heart with the love for humanity that inspired Fourier as he created his system, and it delights the mind with its harmony. It attracts people not by bilious attacks but by inspiring them with love for humanity. In this system there is no hatred. Fourierism doesn't propose any political reform; its reform is economic. It encroaches neither on government nor on property, and at one of the last meetings of the Assembly, Victor Considérant, the spokesman of the Fourierists, solemnly renounced any encroachment on the family. Finally, it's a dilettantish armchair system and will never be a popular one. During the whole time of the February upheaval, the Fourierists didn't once go out into the street but instead remained in the editorial offices of their journal, where they have been spending their time for twenty-odd years, engaged in reverie about the future beauty of the phalanstery. But, without a doubt, this system poses a threat if only for the simple reason that it is a system. Secondly, for all its elegance, it is still a utopia of the most unrealistic sort. But the threat posed by this utopia, if I may take the liberty of expressing myself in this way, is rather more *comic* than terrifying. In the West there is no social system that is unpopular and mocked to such a degree as Fourier's. It would long since have died out; its leaders themselves don't realize that they are living corpses and nothing else. In the West, in France, at present, any system, any theory poses a threat to society; for the hungry proletarians, in their despair, latch onto all remedies and are ready to make a banner out of any remedy. They are at their eleventh hour. Hunger is chasing people into the streets. But Fourierism has been forgotten out of disdain, and even *Cabetism,* more ridiculous than which has never been produced on earth, evokes a lot more sympathy.[6] But, as for what concerns us, Russia, Petersburg, well, here one has only to take twenty steps in the street to become convinced that on our soil Fourierism can only exist in the uncut pages of a book or in a soft, mild, dreamy soul, but not otherwise than in the form of an idyll or in the manner of a verse-poem of twenty-four cantos. Fourierism cannot inflict serious harm. First of all, even if there were to be serious harm, the propagation is certainly a utopia in itself, for it goes unbelievably

6 Cabetism was the doctrine of Étienne Cabet (1788-1856), the utopian socialist. He expounded his views in his novel *Voyage en Icarie.*

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slowly. In order to understand Fourierism completely, one has to study it; and it is a whole science. One has to plough through up to ten volumes. Could such a system ever become popular? Be spread from the lectern through teachers? Why, this is physically impossible, if only because of the scope of the science of Fourierism! But, I repeat, no serious harm can come from Fourier's system and if the Fourierist does inflict harm on anyone, it's only on himself, in the general opinion of those who have any common sense. For me, the most supreme comicality lies in *activity that's universally useless.* And Fourierism, along with any Western system, is so unsuited for our soil, so inappropriate to our circumstances, so out of character with our nation—and, also, to such an extent the handiwork of the West, to such an extent the product of the Western situation, where, at all costs, the proletarian question is being resolved—that with its urgent tenor Fourierism at present for us (among whom there are no proletarians) would be unbearably absurd. The activity of the Fourierist would be the most pointless of all and consequently the most comical. This is why, based on my *guess,* I consider Petrashevsky more clever than that and never *seriously* suspected him of anything beyond an armchair respect for Fourier. All the rest I, *in all honesty,* was ready to take for a joke. A Fourierist is an unfortunate but not a guilty man—that's my opinion.

Finally, in my opinion, not a single paradox, however many there have been, has been able to hold its ground by its own strength. This is what history teaches us. And the proof lies in the fact that in France in a single year nearly all systems collapsed, one after another; and they collapsed by themselves the moment that it came to putting theory into practice. Having taken all this into account, even if I did know (which I don't know, I once again repeat), but even if I did know that Petrashevsky, not afraid of any ridicule, still strives for the spread of Fourierism, then I would still refrain from saying that he poses a definite threat. First of all, how Petrashevsky could pose a threat as a promoter of Fourierism is beyond my comprehension. Laughable but not harmful! This is my opinion, and this is what my conscience makes me answer to the question posed to me.

Finally, another thought has occurred to me that I can't be silent about; it's of a strictly practical nature. I've had an old, long-standing conviction that Petrashevsky is infected with a certain type of vanity. Out of vanity he instituted his Friday gatherings and out of vanity he didn't get fed up with those Friday gatherings. Out of vanity he possessed a lot of books and, apparently, he liked it to be known that he had rare books. Of course, this is nothing more than my observation, my guess, for, I repeat, all that I know about Petrashevsky I know incompletely, imperfectly, by guesses, based on what I saw and heard.

This is my answer. I've reported the truth.

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Artful lying: novelists as biographers

by Marnie Jones

A suggestion by Leon Edel that attention ought to be paid to the way a biography is constructed—the way the life is told rather than the way the life was lived—first sparked my interest in a small group of biographers who also happened to be novelists. Later, reading Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë,* I was intrigued by Professor Alan Shelston's notion that it was Gaskell's training as a novelist that prompted her daringly frank account of the eccentricities of Brontë's father, the Rev. Patrick Brontë, the excesses of her brother, Branwell Brontë, and the indiscretions of Branwell's lover, Lydia Robinson. That seemed to me a sensible idea, and I wondered whether other novelists had followed Gaskell's lead, despite the disastrous reception her book received.

Novelists have of course been making the transition between these genres with some regularity: Defoe, Scott, Cooper, Stevenson, James, Forster, Woolf, Maurois, Sartre, Waugh, and Nabokov all tried their hand at writing lives. But the fact that none of them (with the exception of Maurois, whose claims as a novelist are slight) has been remembered as a biographer suggests that the transition may not always be an easy or successful one. Could its difficulty be attributed to the novelist's tendency to adapt the techniques of fiction to the writing of biography? That also seemed to me a sensible idea.

After taking a close look at biographies by Henry James, E. M. Forster, and Virginia Woolf, as well as Gaskell's, I found that the biographer's fictional interests weren't the problem, the subjects' lives were. For it was what was left out of the life by the author that shaped each book. Gaskell found it necessary to suppress Charlotte Brontë's love for a married man; James halfheartedly attempted to hide his contempt for William Story, the writer and sculptor; Forster dutifully covered up the homosexuality of G. L. Dickinson, the Cambridge don; and Virginia Woolf carefully refrained from revealing that Roger Fry had an affair with her sister. In each of these cases, the biography was built on a lie.

The lie at the center of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* was no surprise to me, though it hadn't made me wary of lies in the other biographies. Before reading Gaskell's account of Charlotte Brontë's life, I knew the story of Charlotte's unfortunate love for Constantin Héger, her employer and tutor in Brussels. We now know that Gaskell knew the story, too. She kept the secret so well that it was not until recently that we could be sure that she did indeed know of Charlotte's feelings for Héger. But even when suppressed, the Héger story manages to color the entire account. For it is that secret, rather than Gaskell's fictional inclinations, that determines the shape and tone of the entire biography.

Gaskell's fascination with Charlotte Brontë began the moment she finished reading

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Jane Eyre. After finding out who the mysterious author "Currer Bell" actually was (Charlotte's work appeared under that pseudonym), she sought her out and eventually established a close friendship with her. Weeks after her friend's death, at the very time that Patrick Brontë was deciding to ask Gaskell to be his daughter's biographer, Gaskell was writing Brontë's publisher, George Smith, to say that though a "record of her could not be made public at present without giving pain" one day she would like to write her friend's life. Since Charlotte's father was one of the major impediments to such a work, Gaskell was surprised to receive his request. Soon after, she began to work.

And she had something of a head start, it seems, having unconsciously thought of herself as Brontë's biographer even while believing the task could not be done for some time. Weeks before she received official sanction she began tracking down possible leads; afterward she visited every place of importance in Charlotte's life, including Brussels, where she uncovered the story she could not tell.

It has commonly been assumed that the demure Mrs. Gaskell, wife of Manchester's Unitarian minister, a woman whose admiration for George Eliot's fiction had trouble surmounting her disapproval of Eliot's living arrangements, must have been shocked by the discovery she made. She suppressed the information when she came to write the *Life.* But I think that even if she was shocked, she was not surprised. There was too much to suggest that there was an unknown love story in Brontë's life. It is, after all, passion that dominates *Jane Eyre,* passion that detractors labeled "coarse." Gaskell had visited Haworth Parsonage during Charlotte's lifetime and had met her husband, the Rev. Arthur Nicholls, after her death. Surely she had seen no source of passion there. From conversations in the Haworth parlor, after Mr. Brontë had retreated to his study, Gaskell had good reason to know that Brontë's art sprang from her life: the horrors of a charity school, the loneliness of the life of a governess, or of a teacher in a foreign school —all came straight from Charlotte's own experience. But there appeared to be one major exception. For Gaskell was not likely to mistake Mr. Nicholls for Brontë's heroes, Mr. Rochester, Robert Moore, or even M. Paul.

Gaskell went to Brussels, the setting for Brontë's final novel, *Villette,* in May of 1856, and I think she went knowing that there the secret could be found. Just before setting sail Gaskell wrote to two of Brontë's friends, two sisters who had known Charlotte from the Brussels years. She said she was going to "ascertain all the particulars she can, relating to Miss Brontë's residence there. She will feel extremely obliged to the Misses Wheelwrights if they will suggest any clues to information there." The Misses Wheelwright were not able to help, but Constantin Héger himself was. When they met, Gaskell found him to be a man she both liked and respected. His wife, still offended by the portrait of her in *Villette,* refused to speak with Gaskell.

Perhaps it was just as well. We will never know what Gaskell and Héger talked about, but it is clear that he showed her Charlotte's sad, lonely letters of love. Back in England, Gaskell fretted over the contents of Charlotte's as yet unpublished first novel, *The Professor.* Would it embarrass Héger even more than *Villette* had done? She wrote to a friend that she believed "him to be too good to publish those letters—but I felt that his friends might really with some justice urge him to do so" if the posthumous novel seemed too compromising.

Clearly Gaskell felt the letters would hurt Brontë's reputation. Thus, Héger's interests and her own coincided, and all mention of the intensity of Charlotte's feeling is suppressed. Gaskell does record the increasing distance in Charlotte's relations with the Hégers while in Brussels, but for obvious reasons underplays the effect it had on Charlotte. When she quotes from Charlotte's letters, she is discreet.

Gaskell had always been interested in portraying Charlotte Brontë as the embodiment of duty amidst great suffering; everything

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she learned at the Pensionnat Héger intensified her confidence in that idea. Charlotte had never spoken openly of her love for Héger but it can be seen in the subtext of her letters. She suffered quietly, waiting month after month for a letter from Brussels, a letter that never came. She died without ever understanding why Héger cut her off. Through those lonely months she suffered with much the same patience that she had shown as a child at Cowan's Bridge school, or as she would show later through Branwell's dissipation, Emily and Anne's painful deaths, and her father's selfish demands. Surely Gaskell the novelist recognized a good story when she saw one. The Héger story is a good one—it is, in effect, the story of *Villette*—but Gaskell could not use it here.

As a result of suppressing this story of Charlotte's patient suffering, Gaskell emphasized it elsewhere. For example, in telling the story of Branwell Brontë's unfortunate love for his employer's wife, Lydia Robinson. In fact, as Brontë's more recent biographer, Winifred Gérin, has shown, Gaskell predated Branwell's decline—into alcoholism and drug addiction—to account for Charlotte's depression in Brussels. Moreover, Gaskell tells the story with all the fervor of a fire-and-brimstone preacher, in effect replacing Charlotte's passion with her own.

Although we may admire Gaskell's willingness to tell the truth about living people, we are apt to dislike the tone of righteous indignation with which she goes after Lydia Robinson. Elsewhere Gaskell extends the sympathy she gives to all her flawed fictional characters even to the less than perfect Patrick and Branwell Brontë, but Lydia Robinson remains beyond its scope. Gaskell admits in the biography that she hopes "by revealing the misery, the gnawing, life-long misery, the degrading habits, the early death of her partner in guilt—the acute and long-enduring agony of his family—to the wretched woman [Lydia Robinson], who not only survives, but passes about in the gay circles of London society, as a vivacious, well-dressed, flourishing widow, there may be awakened in her some feelings of repentance." Judging the legal, rather than the moral response that Gaskell elicited—she was threatened with a libel suit—it seems that she was somewhat less than successful.

The first edition of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* included, along with an impassioned account of Branwell's wrongdoing, with its descriptions of near-starvation and disease at Cowan's Bridge, a portrait of Patrick Brontë as a selfish and lonely old man. Indeed, together with the father in Richardson's *Clarissa,* Patrick Brontë has gone down in literary history as an archetypically impossible father. On the face of it, Patrick Brontë's story seems almost as impossible to tell as Professor Héger's, but Gaskell dared to tell it as she saw it. The difficulty here was magnified by the fact that it was Mr. Brontë who asked her to write the book and upon whose goodwill the whole project depended.

Patrick Brontë is probably best known for his interference in Charlotte's decision to marry rather late in her life. Distressed at the thought that his sole remaining child would leave him alone and nearly blind, and irked by the thought that she would marry a lowly curate, he forbade Arthur Nicholls to speak to his daughter about marriage. (His interference may well have been responsible for their union; there is little evidence that Charlotte was interested in Mr. Nicholls before her father's actions made her feel sorry for the man.)

Although Gaskell does handle the story delicately—she underplays Mr. Brontë's selfish demands in part in order to emphasize Charlotte's selfless acquiescence—people at the time thought the portrait outrageous. (The notable exception was Mr. Brontë himself.) And Gaskell is indeed daringly frank. She accounts for some of his various "eccentricities"—burning his children's boots, forbidding them meat, shredding his wife's silk dress, shooting off a pistol at random—by reference to his Spartan philosophy. But she refuses to explain them all away:

> His opinion might often be both wild and erroneous, his principles of action eccentric and

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> strange, his views of life partial, and almost misanthropical; but not one opinion that he held could be stirred or modified by any worldly motive . . . . It is true that he had strong and vehement prejudices, and was obstinate in maintaining them, and that he was not dramatic enough in his perceptions to see how miserable others might be in a life that to him was all-sufficient. But I do not pretend to be able to harmonize points of character and account for them, and bring them all into one consistent and intelligible whole.

It was the frustration of not being able to tell the Héger story, not for its sensational value but for its implicit moral, that pushed Gaskell to be so frank about Patrick Brontë, just as it pushed her to be so severe with Lydia Robinson. But because she overemphasized Patrick Brontë's responsibility for his daughter's suffering, Gaskell carefully structures the book to create a compensating sympathy. She does so by beginning the story at the end—at the Haworth Parsonage graveyard. The survivors over the years, Gaskell tells us, had found it necessary to make the lines on the Brontë tombstone ever more "small and cramped" until there was no more room. "But one more of that generation—the last of the nursery of six motherless children—was yet to follow, before the survivor, the childless, widowed father, found his rest." In this way, Gaskell manages to produce a positive image of Patrick Brontë at the outset and a tragic, almost heroic, context for the "eccentricities" and downright selfishness that plays so great a part in her story. Here Gaskell shows a sense of just restraint she could not find in dealing with Mrs. Robinson.

There is a similar relationship between what Henry James leaves out of his biography of William Story and what he puts in. I came to *William Wetmore Story and His Friends: From Letters, Diaries, and Recollections* without knowing of James's personal feelings for his subject. I found the book completely mystifying. It has no real center: James repeatedly drifts off on tangents, becoming entangled in his own memories. I wondered why James wrote this book, since his subject, William Story, had such a hard time making his presence felt in what was ostensibly an account of his own life. If Story had had the opportunity of reading the work, he would have had more cause than young David Copperfield for wondering whether he should "turn out to be the hero of [his] own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else."

Gaskell's experience led me to wonder if Story was a precursor of the subjects of Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*—that is, a thoroughly respectable man on the surface but one guilty of shameful selfishness within. Surely if even Charlotte Brontë had a secret to hide, no one could stand public scrutiny. Apparently, there were no skeletons in the Story closet—no indiscretions, no improper feelings. The feelings that James had to hide were his own. For James found himself in the awkward position of writing a two-volume biography of a man he simply did not like. He almost never mentioned Story in his letters, despite the fact that they traveled in the same expatriate community in Rome. The omission itself ought to have provided a clue to the secret in this book. But a passing remark in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton makes the nature of James's problem vivid. "So you're acquainted with Story's Muse," writes James, "that Brazen hussey—to put it plainly. I have rarely seen such a case of *prosperous* pretension as Story. His cleverness is great, the world's good-nature to him is greater."

William Story, a Boston-born sculptor, was one of the first artists who left America to train in Europe. Given James's views on the lack of an American artistic tradition, one would think that he and Story would have had much in common. But that passing remark to Norton reveals the heart of James's dislike. William Story was financially successful as an artist and Henry James just couldn't see why. However irritating that had been to him during Story's lifetime, it must have been doubly so when he came to write the biography. By then his own pop-

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ularity had plummeted and he was experiencing financial difficulty; he agreed to do the book only because he needed the money. Unfortunately, James was writing at a time when biography's purpose was commemorative. In suppressing his own feelings about Story, he distanced Story from the reader, giving the reader the odd sense of viewing Story through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars. In effect, he suppressed Story himself. In the course of writing, though, James became as interested in his task as Gaskell had been in hers and for the same reason; he seems to have been fascinated by what he could not say.

The intensity of James's personal feelings forced him to step back from the particulars of Story's life and freed him to tell his own version of it, a version complete with the trappings from his early novels—exiled American artists and a mesmerizing but somehow ominous Europe. James casts Story as a precursor of American expatriate artists and sees him as preparing the way for James himself. It is an approach that gets James into trouble, for Story made the transition from America to Europe with little of the difficulty that James would later feel. But James tried to impose on Story the same emotional experience that he imposed on many of his early fictional characters. "There were those who didn't go home and those who did," writes James; among those who didn't "were the precursors, in those days, on the path of regret, one might even say repentance, quite as in the path of curiosity and cheer." James prods Story along the "path of regret," but Story's letters reveal only fleeting dissatisfaction with his exile. Situated in Rome during the Civil War years, Story had good reason to believe that the American experiment had failed, that everything he loved about home was changed. He couldn't be further removed, in both sensibility and situation, from another Jamesian artist-exile, Roderick Hudson, the hero of his first novel. Hudson, even before he leaves his New England home for Rome, is suddenly hit with "a strange feeling of prospective regret . . . . Something seemed to tell him that later, in a foreign land, he should be haunted by it, should remember it all with longing and regret. 'It is a wretched business,'" he decides, "'this virtual quarrel of ours with our country.'"

Despite Story's quite different feelings, James casts him as the first artist to feel at war with his country and actually to do something about it. Aside from imposing on Story feelings that Story felt only in passing, this strategy is at odds with another theme in the book: the celebration of old Rome. Story left America a generation before James did. His Rome was enticingly pure—pure of the American influence that James encountered in his life and wrote of in his fiction. James's novels and short stories make it clear that both the individual American and Europe itself pay a price for their contact with each other. Yet the price had not yet been exacted in Story's lifetime; the contact had been too brief. So James vacillates between envying Story the thoroughly European Europe that he himself was born too late to experience and attempting to force upon Story an ambivalent attitude toward his expatriate life.

Envy wins out. James may have begun the biography by disliking Story for his pretensions, but he soon came to envy him his opportunities. We can almost hear James wondering why Rome should have been wasted on a man of Story's sensibilities. He tried to correct the situation by allowing his own sensibility, his heightened consciousness, to ramble about in Story's world—and we lose sight of Story in the process. Early in volume one James quotes Emelyn Story's diary to the effect that she and her husband "'were forced to pass through a house and go out upon a little terrace.'" The quotation is without interest, but James uses it to thrust himself into the scene. He continues: "we warrant indeed they were, and we pass through the house with them, and also go out on the terrace, lingering even longer than they, thinking of many things, having to make an effort, positively, to come back again and overtake them on another occasion . . . ." Time and again, James emerges

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from the shadows at the end of a scene in order to make sense of it for the reader. Sometimes he intrudes before the scene ever gets going, for he finds his own terrace thoughts much more interesting than Story's. Throughout the biography, we watch James make the wrenching effort "positively" to come back from his own thoughts to his subject.

The people who shared Story's world also divert James's attention from William Story. James tries to sanction this by referring to "friends" in the title, but even that does not prepare us for the fact that the letters of Story's friends—of Robert Browning, James Lowell, Charles Sumner—take up more space in the biography than Story's own. But Story's friends have to make way for even more pervasive presences in the book, for "shades" of the past, as James called them, haunt this biography. James acknowledges that his own "romantic spirit melts" over the sources for his task—old photographs, jottings, memoranda, "snatches of small heart-breaking arithmetic." (Perhaps his heart broke over the arithmetic because Story's Rome was not only more pure, it was also cheap.) These artifacts are used to evoke people long dead—a Lady William Russell, a General Case, a Princess Belgiojoso—and always at the expense of William Story.

Thus, the lie at the center of this book freed James to pursue his own interests. But ultimately he could not resist making his true feelings known: that Story was not a particularly inspired sculptor and his attempts at poetry were awful. James destroys Story's pretensions to poetry by simply quoting some of his verse from a book in which Robert Browning looms large. The reader cannot help making the comparison. Story's letters, too, pale in comparison to Browning's and Lowell's.

James tries to account for the quality of Story's art by looking at the fact of his expatriation:

> It becomes interesting, in light of so distinct an example, to extract from the case—the case of the permanent absentee or exile—the general lesson that may seem to us latent in it. This moral seems to be that somehow, in the long run, Story *paid*—paid for having sought his development even among the circumstances that at the time of his choice appeared not alone the only propitious, but the only possible. It was as if the circumstances on which, to do this, he had turned his back, had found an indirect way to be avenged for the discrimination. Inevitably, indeed, we are not able to say what a lifetime of Boston would have made, in him, or would have marred; we can only be sure we should in that case have had to deal with quite a different group of results.

James acknowledges that the lesson is a "latent" one, that he is not sure what "a lifetime of Boston would have made" of him. But his opinion of Story's art is no less clear: after all, the "group of results" Story actually left behind is precisely that which led James to conclude that Story had indeed paid a price. James's discussion of Story's "temperament" is equally convoluted and telling:

> Of all the victims (so far as victim he was) of the famous "artistic temperament," he was the least detached from other cares of the mind. His aesthetic sensibility, active as it was, was not a jealous, not an exclusive housemate. His mind begot ideas about everything, opinions, convictions, things that at the moment were passions; which things, in their turn, kept him perpetually at the pitch of communication, expression, discussion. He spent his life in the happy condition of never being without a *subject* (for affirmation, irritation, emphasis, for free development of some sort) . . . a provision for our happiness, in general, it may be said, than which fate makes none better.

Here James appears to be positive about Story, but between the lines it is easy to find the suggestion that Story had no focus and that his passions were both miscellaneous and superficial.

If the Story family was taken in by James's convoluted expressions, Henry Adams, for

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one, was not. He wrote James to say that he saw what James intended and that the book was "more keen for what is beneath, implied, intelligible only to me, and a half a dozen other people still living." James was no more willing to be straightforward in his letter to Adams than he had been in the biography itself, but his response lends credence to Adams's view. While James did not directly agree that Adams was right in suggesting that he was portraying Story as superficial, he did admit that he thought that only a few people would be able to see beneath the surface and he ended by saying, "and they won't, I hope, too promiscuously tell!"

The secret at the center of *Goldworthy Lowes Dickinson* is not, like James's, the author's own, but it certainly was one the author could identify with. Forster's biography is a rather lifeless account of a man who had been his longtime friend, a Cambridge don, and an important contributor to the founding of the League of Nations—in short, a person of great respectability. Forster wanted to keep it that way. It was not until I read Forster's primary source for the biography—*The Autobiography of G. Lowes Dickinson*—that I began to see how complicated Forster's book is. Forster, it turns out, was as fascinated with what he could not say as Gaskell and James had been before him.

The Autobiography of G. Lowes Dickinson, which both Dickinson and Forster referred to as his "Recollections," was first published in 1973. In the preface to his biography Forster claims that the "Recollections" were his authority for everything in the biography. Yet when I read the *Autobiography* it didn't seem possible that Forster's Dickinson and Dickinson's Dickinson could be the same man. The memoir is an intimate record of Dickinson's introduction to sex and sexual fantasy, his homosexuality, fetish for boots, and penchant for heterosexuals. In a letter to Forster, Dickinson voiced worry over the accuracy of a memoir written so long after the events had taken place. But he was confident that "no one has ever written anything so candid."

Candid it is. Yet this is the document that Forster claimed was his "authority." How could it have been when it had been virtually unusable? In fact, it *was* Forster's authority, although not in the conventional sense of the word. Because embarrassing, the particulars disclosed in the "Recollections" seem to give Forster the warrant to tell another version of the story.

He chose to pursue two stories. One, for the general public, gives a whitewashed account of Dickinson as the best that the English system, and Cambridge in particular, could produce. The second story, for the limited circle of Dickinson's friends, alludes to the true story in a kind of code. The reference to the "Recollections" being Forster's authority is but one example of the book's irony. Elsewhere in the preface Forster makes the rather outrageous statement, in view of his own homosexuality, "I have not tried to exclude facts about him with which I am not in sympathy or which might be held to decrease his reputation."Now, why would Forster go out of his way to say something so patently false? He was, I think, having fun at the reader's expense. The comment refers, on the face of it, to Forster's bold decision to admit that Dickinson was fond of Shelley and Goethe, a taste Forster frankly admits he does not share. Thus Forster "risks" revealing Dickinson's literary inclinations while suppressing his sexual ones. Once you know what is missing, you can practically hear Forster saying "Ah, but I never said I wouldn't exclude facts about him with which I *am* in sympathy!"

Unfortunately, the story Forster chose to suppress is the only interesting one in Dickinson's life. Forster's account is quite dry. Not much happened to "Goldie" Dickinson, at least not much that could be written about in 1936. The really interesting questions, such as how his homosexuality was connected to his habitual despair, or why he was repeatedly attracted to heterosexuals, could not be raised, much less answered. Although Forster professed in his diary to being satisfied with the book, in the biography itself he admits failure. He writes: "A biogra-

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phy of him, if it succeeded, would resemble him, would achieve the unattainable, express the inexpressible, turn the past into the everlasting." After making this rather large claim for biography's potential, he concludes by quoting Goethe. "Have I done that? 'Das Unbeschreibliche hier ist's getan?' [Has the indescribable here been done?] No. And perhaps it could only be done through music. But that is what lured me on." The question surely refers, at least in part, to the homosexuality that could not be written about. The next line in *Faust,* which Forster chose not to include, seems to confirm this: "Das Ewig-Weibliche/Zieht uns hinan. [The Eternal Feminine draws us to perfection.]"

The facts that were so crippling to Forster as a biographer freed him to move toward the genre in which he excelled. Indeed, Forster imaginatively reconstructed Dickinson's life much as a novelist constructs a fictional character. Particularly close readers—the Henry Adamses of Forster's generation—were likely to get veiled hints of Dickinson's homosexuality, but by and large Forster's two "stories," like James's irreconcilable impulses, simply confuse. They confuse not only because readers may stop short at the veiled hints but also because the hints are at odds with the official version. That Dickinson was a man of melancholy temperament is attested to by his friends as well as by his own letters and memoir. Forster's letters to Dickinson also confirm it. At one point at the end of the war Forster wrote to Dickinson, saying that though he understood Dickinson's despair, he did not share it. Yet in his preface Forster discounts this side of Dickinson's personality, claiming that the only problem with the "Recollections" is that Dickinson had a "tendency to write it down as rather sadder than he felt it to have been." Oddly enough, the biography that follows presents a melancholy man. The disparity between the preface, which discounts the melancholy, and the biography, which reveals it, suggests that Forster unwillingly, or at least unconsciously, slipped into portraying the melancholy in the book itself. Why did he try to discount it, when his own correspondence proves and the biography itself confirms that he recognized Dickinson's characteristic gloom? Was it because he did not feel Dickinson's despair himself? I think not. The inconsistency seems to be tied to Forster's conflicting interest in Dickinson's sexuality.

Dickinson himself saw his melancholy as a product of his homosexuality, as his letters, the "Recollections," and an unpublished manuscript entitled "Dialogue on Homosexuality" all reveal. In that dialogue the character who speaks for Dickinson says that "I should think that the other kind of man had more chance of reaching happiness."[1] I think Forster tried to suppress Dickinson's melancholy because it was so connected to his homosexuality that it seemed dangerous to include it.

The central suppression creates another disparity between the preface and the biography. In the preface Forster claims that one of Dickinson's remarkable traits was his "unity of character." According to Forster, Dickinson suffered from no doubts or divisions. This surprises for two reasons. First, anyone familiar with Dickinson's "Recollections" would notice that, far from being an exceptionally unified personality, he was driven by conflict, pulled in several directions. But even readers unfamiliar with the memoir would have cause for surprise since in the biography Forster lets the reader know that Dickinson did not see himself that way. Discussing Dickinson's last-minute career switch from medicine to academia, Forster writes: "It is a queer little display of wobbling, and in his opinion (not in mine) it is typical of his character." Forster goes no further than stating that they disagreed on this point but one wonders why he included Dickinson's view. Dickinson's letters and his memoir do support his own view of himself as an especially disunified man. He repeat-

1 The manuscript of "Dialogue on Homosexuality" is at King's College Library, Cambridge University. It is quoted here by permission of the Dickinson Estate.

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edly speaks of the "division," the "divided focus," and the "double impulse" that kept him in "a state of tension and unrest." In an unmailed letter to a man he loved that was copied into the "Recollections," Dickinson wrote: "It's a curious thing to have a woman's soul shut up in a man's body, but that seems to be my case." This image of Dickinson's profoundly divided nature reveals why Forster was so interested in his own version of Dickinson's psychology: considering Dickinson's characteristic "wobbling" would come uncomfortably close to considering his sexuality. His divided nature, along with his melancholy, had to be suppressed in a biography that suppressed the basis of both these traits. Yet Forster is not entirely willing, after all, to hide Dickinson's true nature. He raises a question in the reader's mind by announcing that Dickinson would not have agreed with him. This seems to serve no other purpose than to alert the reader to another, and truer, version of the story.

Virginia Woolf didn't think much of Forster's biography. She knew Dickinson personally and surely knew of the particular constraints that Forster had had to work under. But that did not stop her from taking on a biography of Roger Fry, the art critic, a biography that would be especially difficult for her to write since Fry had had a passionate affair with Woolf's sister, Vanessa Bell. Woolf went to some pains to inform herself about the details of the affair. Not only did she read Fry's love letters to her sister, she copied out extracts from over one hundred of them. She went to all this trouble to understand her subject better. For there is nothing to suggest that Woolf ever intended to be anything but discreet.

As a reviewer, Woolf herself was not very tolerant of discreet biographers. In a review of *Mary Russell Mitford and Her Surroundings,* she wrote: "To come to the point, the great merit of these scrapbooks, for they can scarcely be called biographies, is that they license mendacity. One cannot believe what Miss Hill says about Miss Mitford, thus one is free to invent Miss Mitford for oneself." Woolf taunts the reader in the review; what, we wonder, does Miss Hill lie about? Several pages later we find that Miss Hill faced one of Gaskell's dilemmas but failed to emulate Gaskell's daring. Woolf makes fun of Miss Hill's timidity:

> But how dangerous a thing is life! Can one be sure that anything not wholly made of mahogany will to the very end stand empty in the sun? Even cupboards have their secret springs and when, inadvertently, we are sure, Miss Hill touches this one, out, terrible to relate, topples a stout old gentleman. In plain English, Miss Mitford had a father. There is nothing actually improper in that: many women have had fathers. But Miss Mitford's father was kept in a cupboard; that is to say, he was not a nice father.

Woolf criticizes Miss Hill for exactly the trick she herself was later to use. She did not need to stuff Sir Edward Fry in a cupboard, but she firmly placed her own sister there.

Vanessa Bell has only a subliminal presence in the biography of Roger Fry. Yet her effect on his life was immeasurable. It was Vanessa who gave him reason to live after his wife's bouts with mental illness ended in her institutionalization. Fry maintained a passionate love for Vanessa for a good fifteen years after she had established a regular, if unconventional, relationship with the painter Duncan Grant. And yet her name is mentioned only a handful of times. Apparently, Virginia Woolf was even more convinced than E. M. Forster had been that the subject to be suppressed was dangerous. She creates no coded account of the story, and she all but erases Vanessa from the record of Fry's life.

In a way, though, Vanessa is frequently present. She hovers beneath the surface. For instance, Woolf provides a "glimpse" of Fry "caught a year or two before on a lawn at Cambridge. The trees were in leaf, and through the green light by the side of the summer river came two figures, both tall, both for some reason memorable and distinguished. Who were they? 'Roger Fry and

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his wife.' And they disappeared." Who asks this question? Who answers? The biography never makes it clear. But the incident really did happen; the brief glimpse of Roger and Helen Fry amidst the Cambridge shrubbery belonged to Vanessa and her husband Clive Bell. Vanessa asked the question and her husband provided the answer. Thus, Woolf chose to record the moment her sister first saw the man who would become her lover. Like James and Forster, Woolf wants to tell the story. Unlike them, she does not provide an easily decipherable code.

Woolf includes another incident important in Fry and Vanessa's relationship—a day that almost turned Vanessa against him. The passage does not even begin to suggest what is beneath the surface:

> There was something stable about his mobility. Mobile he was. He was just off—was it to Paris or to Poland? He had to catch a train. He seemed used to catching trains whether to Poland or to Paris. It was only for a week or two, and then he would be back. Out came a little engagement book. The pages were turned rapidly. He murmured in his deep voice through a long list of engagements, and at last chose a day and noted it. But that particular Sunday he chose for a first visit to Durbins [his home] was somehow muddled. There was no cab; there was no Roger Fry. The contrition—but the blame must be laid on the "cussed nature of human affairs"—he inflicted upon his would-be guests, the horrors, about which no one could be more eloquent than he, of Sunday lunch at an English inn.

One wonders, why include this muddled visit? What is important about the horrors of that Sunday's lunch? What one doesn't know, because one isn't told, is that the stranded visitors were Clive and the then pregnant Vanessa Bell. At the time, Vanessa was furious. The story is important only in the context of Fry's later relationship with Vanessa. It is the sort of story that happy lovers love to tell later (how they almost never met, how they hated each other at first).

Fry's feelings for Vanessa were linked to his passion for art. Woolf makes good use of this connection;-she manages to account for Fry's ecstasy when first in love with Vanessa by attributing it to his excitement over Post-Impressionism. As Elizabeth Gaskell found ways to reveal Charlotte Brontë's depression by linking it to Branwell Brontë instead of to Héger, Woolf manages to reveal Fry's feelings but not their source.

Woolf hides sex behind art. The one passage in the biography that comes close to giving a coded account describes Fry's relationship with Vanessa in a less than forthright way:

> There was the new friendship with Vanessa Bell, who, as a painter belonging to the younger generation, had all the ardour of the young for the new movements and the new pictures and urged him away from the past and on to the future. There was her painting and her studio and the younger generation arguing with him and laughing at him, but accepting him as one of themselves. All this brought about a change that showed itself even in his face so that a friend meeting him in the street exclaimed "What's happened to you? You look ten years younger."

For one equipped with the facts it is clear that more than the smell of paint and the lively studio conversation and laughter brought about this change, the "ardour" Woolf describes. Vanessa Bell led Roger Fry away from the past and on to the future in life as well as in art; she enabled him to move away from the horror of his wife's insanity and look to the future with hope. But the reader of *Roger Fry* never knows that.

If the biography loses vitality by excluding Vanessa Bell, perhaps that is the price that had to be paid in 1940, literarily, for unsanctioned sexual relations. But why did Woolf suppress her *own* presence? Originally she had thought about including her friendship with Fry. She wrote in her diary: "I think I will go on doggedly till I meet him myself—1910—and then attempt something more fictitious." In the book itself, however, she suppresses her own presence more thor-

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oughly than she suppresses her sister's. It may be going too far to call the book "fictitious," but by suppressing herself she does parallel her fiction. The biographer's voice, like the narrator's voice in her novels, is oddly dissociated. Chapter Seven opens with the information "To a stranger meeting him there for the first time (1910) he looked much older than his age. He was only forty-four, but he gave the impression of a man with a great weight of experience behind him." The stranger is of course, as the diary tells us, the biographer herself. It is the suppression of Woolf's perfectly acceptable relationship with Fry that accounts for the tone of dispassionate observance in the book. Woolf reveals Fry glimpsed at from behind a hedge, dashing off to Poland, in a studio, or on the street, from the eyes of a disembodied person, the "friend" who thinks he looks years younger than he is or the "stranger" who thinks he looks years older. Think of Woolf's novels and the approach will seem familiar.

But Woolf's decision to suppress her own presence in this biography was more than a matter of adapting fictional techniques to biography. In Vanessa and Helen Fry, the two most important women in Roger Fry's life, Virginia Woolf saw herself. In some sense, to tell their stories would be to tell her own. Virginia Woolf's letters, as well as Vanessa's and Fry's, reveal that Woolf was both envious of and disturbed by the affair. It was at this time that Woolf intensified her rather dangerous flirtation with Clive Bell, and it was not until Vanessa had rejected Fry that she and Fry became good friends. Both acknowledged that one of the things they shared was a need of Vanessa.

Woolf does not suppress the fact that Helen Fry was mentally ill, or that her illness was a traumatic, life-altering experience for Fry. But she handles the subject with great care, from a distance. Of course, the story would have been a distressing one for Fry's family to read; but I think it would have been just as distressing for Woolf to write. Helen Fry's symptoms (though not, apparently, their cause) resembled the insanity Woolf herself struggled with. Dr. Savage, the doctor who treated Woolf and who was immortalized in literature as the "obscurely evil" Dr. Bradshaw in *Mrs. Dalloway,* also treated Helen Fry. It was this intimate involvement—more intimate than that of the other novelist-biographers under consideration here with their "secrets"—that accounted for the suppression of both Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf in *Roger Fry.*

What can the experience of these four biographers tell us about the writing of lives? Despite the fact that biographers now seem to revel in telling all, I think there is a lesson to be learned from these biographies.

We have never been quite sure whether to grant biography the status of an art form. Virginia Woolf and André Maurois, among others, debated whether biography was art or science. And while today we may have confidently decided that it is not a science, we haven't yet determined what it is. One of the reflections of our indecision may be seen in the college curriculum. Biographies aren't taught. The two biographers who do make it into the classroom are Johnson and Boswell, and their presence helps place the argument against biography as an art form. *The Lives of the Poets* and *The Life of Johnson,* all agree, are literary works. The others, by implication, are not.

I think biographies are literary works, but I don't think we can read through them as we read through novels. Neither, of course, are biographies straight factual accounts. In order to fully understand what is going on in a biography, the reader must rival the biographer in knowing the life. That is as true for Ellmann and Joyce or Painter and Proust as it is for Forster and Dickinson. If what doesn't get said can so thoroughly determine what does get said, can we ever fully understand a biography without literally following the biographer's footsteps? It was Carlyle—who on both counts was in a position to know—who said that it was as difficult to write a good life as it was to live one. It may also be as difficult to see a biography for what it is as to see a life for what it is.

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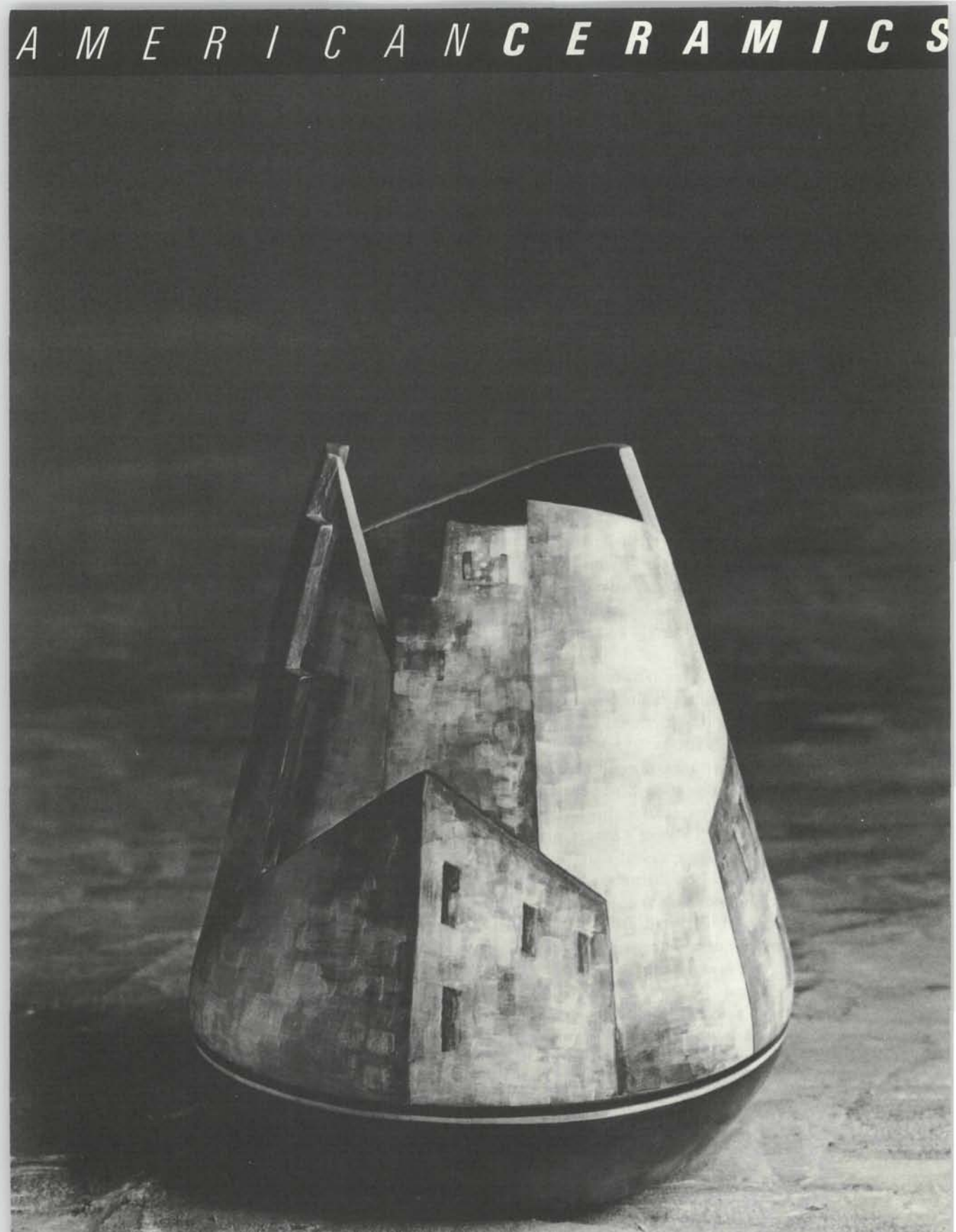

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Untitled (1983) by Ladislav Bakic. 14" (35cm) high. Photo: Brad Guice.

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Art

The brevity of Juan Gris

by Dan Hofstadter

At the very end of June, 1914, as if washed up by the outermost ripple of the tidal wave that had broken over Central Europe a few hours before, Josette and Juan Gris stepped off the southbound train at Rivesaltes, not far from the Catalan border. Josette was French, from Touraine; Juan (known to everyone as "Jean") was Spanish by birth and French in culture, though virtually stateless since he had evaded the Spanish draft some eight years earlier. She was dark and pretty, with the saucy lucent eyes of a *midinette* in an old Parisian movie. He had the sensual features and color of a Creole, and a brooding, self-chastised expression.

To the vacationing eye Rivesaltes soon showed itself "a barbarous place with no trees," as Jean noted on the back of a postcard to his friend, the picture-dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler. So the couple "fled by the first train" to Collioure on the Côte Vermeil. Here Jean rented "a nice house" on the rue de l'Église, about fifty yards to the left of the church, and even located the house on the postcard, and marked it with his pen. The postcard showed the waterfront of a picturesque fishing village.

About a week later Jean wrote to Kahnweiler again. "My dear friend," he said, "I have been meaning to write to you for several days, but time passes so quickly . . . . It's not that I spend my days on the beach or in the countryside, for as yet I have neither bathed nor been for a walk. The house I am living in is so charming that I have not the slightest desire to go out. It's situated just opposite the bridge where all the sailing-boats are anchored, and in the early morning (I get up at seven o'clock) I can watch the arrival of the sardine fleet. I spend the whole day on the top floor where there are two studios leading off the balcony. In one I work, and in the other I prepare and store my canvases. As for work, I haven't done any so far. For the last week I have been wearing myself out in vain. One thing after another has had to be scrapped, either because it was no good or because it was not good enough. Everything seems topsy-turvy, and things I was pleased with in Paris look ridiculous to me here.

"Would you be so kind as to pay my rent to the concierge . . . ."

In the matter of Jean's unpaid Paris rent, as in so many other matters, Kahnweiler's help was the final resort. But there was no help for most of what was happening in Europe. The socialist tribune Jean Jaurès was soon to be murdered while trying to form an international union against war, and by August 1 placards announcing a general mobilization were posted in Collioure and in all the towns and villages of the Pyrénées Orientales. Jean was rapidly running out of money, and in the midst of the war fever his letter to Kahnweiler received no reply. As an alien draft-dodger residing in a country on the verge of open hostilities, he grew more and more distraught, and on the day of the mobilization order he sent Kahnweiler an-

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other, desperate, note: "I have no idea where you are, nor whether amid all these troubles of war you will receive this letter. At all events, the fact is that down here the panic is increasing from hour to hour—perhaps that's the fault of the southern sun. The reservists have been called up, and the foreigners, summoned to the Town Hall to reveal their closest secrets, have been involved in a mass of fines and proceedings for not having their papers in order; some have even been threatened with deportation while the local tradesmen are hurriedly laying in stocks . . . .

"Besides this, everyone is talking about the latest news, Juarès's death . . . . If you really think the situation is getting worse will you please be so kind as to send me three hundred francs . . . ."

Apparently it did not occur to Jean that Kahnweiler might be in graver peril than himself. Yet as a German national, the picture-dealer, despite a certain sympathy for the French side, was not only an alien but an enemy alien, and in July he had abandoned Paris and taken up residence in Rome. Meanwhile the British Expeditionary Corps arrived rather smaller than might have been hoped. After a vain attempt to stem the German advance, the Allies suddenly found themselves in headlong retreat toward Paris.

The tide, as we know, was to turn. About the same time that the "Miracle of the Marne" was acquiring its miraculous character—the endless stream of soldier-laden taxicabs puttering out from Paris to the front—Gris in Collioure had an idea that was to prove greatly significant to his work and life. This idea, though entailing several knotty design problems, was simple enough in itself. Since 1912 he had busied himself almost exclusively with collages. In making these representations or transmutations of still life, he had felt comfortable in limiting himself to a table top and its customary denizens—pipe, newspaper, fruit—perhaps with a wall or two behind, papered or dadoed, as a foil. Each one of these images was a sort of *voyage autour de ma table,* or in the case of the more encompassing ones, *de ma chambre.* Jean's new picture, which he finished sometime in October, as the defense of Paris began to seem assured, was different. The table and the objects were still there—deftly arranged—and there was also, as often before, a newspaper, though he had never previously used this particular one. (It was—doubtless in memory of Jaurès—the *Socialiste des Pyrénées Orientales.*) None of this was especially new. The novel complication was a window, brought forward and spliced with the table in the Cubist fashion. And covering this window, wholly blocking the view, was a Venetian blind. This picture is called *La Jalousie (The Sun-Blind).*

Perhaps the punning title was not Jean's own invention. But it might as well have been, so great is the sense of yearning, almost of jealousy—a jealousy of all that is happening outdoors—in that drawn blind, and in the way the light steals in between its slats, taunting the viewer with dreams of what lies beyond. This mildly melancholic image puts you in mind of childhood illnesses, or of hours of frayed nerves when the world seems too ebulliently wounding to be granted entry. But it also has a positive aspect. Perhaps because we know that Jean was to paint many window pictures, this first one seems charged with anticipation—with potential energy. It conveys the sensuality of awakening in some Mediterranean village like Collioure when the sun is already high and a sort of tidal murmur of voices laps at your window and makes you want to throw it open and lean out. Mallarmé, Jean's favorite poet, had written of wan faces framed by mullions gazing out at the deep blue sky. The theme was scarcely new to art, and anyone with a bit of cultural imagination can ring a few changes on it. Yet this traditional metaphor was one of the few that would consistently appeal to the young Cubist, and it first appears charged with his own matutinal hopes. Jean, then twenty-nine, was just entering his prime as a painter: his window was beckoning to be opened.

Meanwhile Kahnweiler had managed to send Jean some money. Since the picture-

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dealer could no longer sell Jean's paintings, however, the financial strain of advancing him regular sums from a neutral perch was becoming too burdensome. This led to a temporary rupture of their business relations and even to a certain strain on their friendship. This friendship has been much discussed, but it was so crucial to Gris's development, and had so curiously fraternal a quality, that it asks to be considered anew.

The man who called himself "Juan Gris" ("John Gray," though *gris* also means "tipsy" in French) was born José Victoriano González in Madrid in 1887. His father was a rich merchant who failed when Gris was seven. Of the fourteen children in the family—Gris was the thirteenth—ten died in childhood. Gris decided to become an artist, and at the age of twenty he arrived in Paris with sixteen francs in his pocket. Liable to prosecution in Spain for draft evasion—the Spanish Army was mired in a pacification campaign in North Africa—he had burnt his bridges behind him. He found a live-in studio in the basement of the house known as the "Bateau Lavoir," where Picasso lived, and began to support himself by doing humorous newspaper illustrations. Josette joined him in 1912.

It was in the passage leading to Picasso's studio that Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler first noticed Jean. He was struck by his good looks and especially his "large brown eyes, the whites of which were bluish." Jean liked to dance to the records he played on his wind-up phonograph, and occasionally he would shuffle nimbly out his door as Kahnweiler was hurrying by. Kahnweiler was appalled by Jean's studio—the smoking stove, the piles of cigarette butts, the columns of figures scribbled on the walls, which the poet Pierre Reverdy would amiably add up for the painter whenever he was able to acquit his debts. But the squalor did not prevent Kahnweiler from cultivating its perpetrator, who loathed it himself, and a few years later Jean pledged his entire production to his protector, whose name he pronounced "Cavalère." This must have sounded like the Spanish *caballero* (knight; gentleman), and indeed Kahnweiler seems to have wanted to succor poor Jean in perpetuity, so to speak. Sometimes Jean, his spirits depressed by his poverty and obscurity, would ventilate all his despair on Kahnweiler, and Kahnweiler would remind him of Cézanne.

"But I am not Cézanne, *mon vieux,*" Jean would retort. "I am not Cézanne."

"No," Kahnweiler would reply, "but you are Juan Gris."

Usually this lovely answer soothed poor Jean, but sometimes it did not suffice. Then he would look away and mutter, "What if Cavalère is wrong? What if he is?"—raising shadowy issues of identity.

Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler was a man of mark in his own right. Born in 1884 (some three years before Gris) and reared in Stuttgart, he had come to Paris, about the same time as the artist, to work as a stockbroker. He was enthralled by modern painting and soon threw finance to the wind. Though he possessed no personal funds to speak of, he opened a gallery in a former tailor's shop in the rue Vignon. One of Gris's rare portrait drawings shows the German posed before a group of canvases, his falconish, long-lashed eyes gazing out from beneath a pair of skeptically flexed eyebrows. The nose, so straight it looks drawn with a ruler, proposes itself as a sort of warranty for the whole face; and the mouth is bounded above by such a disabused, crossbow-like, *intelligent* curve that one impatiently awaits its pronouncements. Kahnweiler did of course become a great exponent of Cubist theory, as well as a remarkable biographer, publisher, and maker and remaker of fortunes. His splendid stock was to be sequestered by the French government during the 1914-18 war, yet he recouped its entire value within a few years. To Jean, however, he seems to have filled the role of elder brother. In saying this I am guessing of course, working on the hunch that Jean, who had lost so many elder siblings, felt rather anxious and abandoned in the world. But what other hypothesis so simply explains his endless casual mooching from the older man, or his exaggerated deference to his taste, or even his crestfallen

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confessions of venial sins and lapses? On re-establishing contact with Kahnweiler after the latter's flight from Paris, for example, he wrote: "Where shall I go? And how? . . . Please write and tell me what seems to you the best thing to do?" Later, in October of 1914, he reported to Kahnweiler on his health: "I have not been very well recently: frequent bouts of nausea and a slight temperature." And in November, when their exclusive contract was collapsing under the pressures of war, came this desperately loyal vow: "Until now not a single picture has ever left, nor will leave, my studio without your consent." It was a pact with an angel. But the angel had flown far—too far—away, to Bern in fact, for the duration of the war. His place was to be taken by a squat peasant woman from Oakland with oodles and oodles of money.

"Ma chère Mademoiselle," wrote Jean from Collioure as his cupboard approached absolute bareness, "This brings my kindest remembrances and also my regards to you as well as to Miss Alice." As it happened, Gertrude Stein, throning in the rue Fleurus, was not specially taken with Jean. In fact she was the only one who called him "Juan." "Juan was in those days a tormented and not particularly sympathetic character," she later owned. "He was very melancholy and effusive and as always clear-sighted and intellectual. He was at that time painting almost entirely in black and white and his pictures were very sombre. Kahnweiler who had befriended him was an exile in Switzerland, and his sister in Spain was able to help him only a little. His situation was desperate." But Stein was by no means incapable of her own brand of kind remembrance. She sent him two hundred francs, and under solicitation from Matisse, who had been in Collioure that summer and conceived an affection for Jean, agreed to provide him with a monthly stipend. This too eventually dried up, and only the Armistice was to rescue Josette and Jean from their dire financial straits. Still, it is to Kahnweiler and to Stein that we owe most of the serious collecting of Gris's paintings.

It is now some twenty-five years since a broad retrospective of Gris's work has been mounted in the United States. Thus, the exhibition now on view at the University Art Museum in Berkeley, California, entitled "Juan Gris," is most welcome.[1] It offers over ninety paintings, drawings, and collages spanning the artist's brief career. These pictures have been wisely chosen and will doubtless not be reassembled for many years.

All the phases of Gris's work—"analytic," *"papier collé,"* "synthetic," and the so-called "penitent" style of the mid-Twenties, in which the rigorous Cubist aesthetic was relaxed at considerable cost—are well represented. The painter, who remained impoverished and largely unappreciated until his death in 1927, found able literary champions while still alive. Apart from his own late theoretical writings, impenetrable to me, his work received thoughtful critical attention not only from Kahnweiler and his German comrades but also from the poet Maurice

1 "Juan Gris" was organized by Mark Rosenthal, curator of twentieth-century art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It will be shown at the University Art Museum in Berkeley from February 1 through April 10 before traveling to the Guggenheim Museum in New York, where it will be on view from May 18 through July 15. The show originally appeared at the National Gallery of Art in Washington from October 16 through December 31, 1983. The catalogue of the exhibition, *Juan Gris,* was published by the University Art Museum of the University of California at Berkeley and by Abbeville Press ($35.00 hardbound, $15.00 paper). Works referred to in this article are: *Letters of Juan Gris (1913-1927),* collected by Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, translated and edited by Douglas Cooper (London, 1956); *The Grace and Philip Sandblom Collection* (Stockholm Nationalmuseum, 1981), essay by Dr. Philip Sandblom (a slightly expanded version of this book has recently been published and distributed by the George F. Stickley Co. under the title *Creativity and Disease*); and *Juan Gris,* by Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler (London, 1947). I wish to thank my friend Dr. Jay Portnow of the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania for the hours he spent with me studying Gris's medical history.

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Raynal and the editor of the influential *Cahiers d'Art,* Christian Zervos. Hence the present collection is not especially revealing, though it certainly is seductive. Gris, as has often been said, was the Cubist most bent on achieving traditional effects of color, chiaroscuro, and finish. To my mind, however, two minor myths are here laid to rest. The first is that there was something particularly Spanish about Gris's still lifes. In fact, apart from his liking for sharp tonal contrasts (a Spanish but also a general European phenomenon during the Counter-Reformation), his still lifes are not especially reminiscent of those of, say, Zurbarán, Meléndez, or Juan van der Hamen. Actually, Gris, who cherished a settled hatred of Spain, was far fonder of French painting as represented by Fouquet, Philippe de Champaigne, and the Le Nain tribe—all rigorists like himself. The other myth is that his canvases exude an odor of sanctity, or, as Gertrude put it in an access of phrase-making, "an atmosphere of transsubstantiation." For like many Spaniards, Gris sneered at Catholicism, even expressing his disdain for the piety of Céret, a village near the Spanish border where he lived for a while and whose people made an annual Procession of the Resurrection and a pilgrimage to the Monastery of Saint-Ferréol. What is more, the sort of hushed isolation that can exalt and sanctify a still-life object nowhere occurs in his work, where the gewgaws sociably jostle and the pasted-on newspapers now and then wax voluble, babbling and punning and cracking in-jokes. Taken together these papers represent no particular tendency: *Le Figaro* catered to Society, *Le Matin* offered *Poincarisme* and fetching art direction, *Le Journal* published Zola and Léon Daudet and Paul Bourget indifferently, and *L'Intransigeant,* an ex-Socialist evening paper, ran Max Jacob, Apollinaire, and Alain-Fournier. But they do serve to introduce the chatter of the streets and salons into Gris's pictorial perfectionism, as if he were insisting that he was not, after all, so different from the common run of mankind. That is why his art seems to me secular and witty and Parisian, and if "perfect" at all (as Gertrude said it was), then perfect only in intention and not necessarily in execution.

Mark Rosenthal's catalogue essay refrains from lengthily analyzing Gris's pictures, and mercifully too, because if you have them before you then you require no help, and if you don't then nothing will avail. Mr. Rosenthal also brushes aside without qualms the formalist approach to Gris's Cubism in favor of a refreshing receptivity to the painter's "poetic" sensibility. But when he begins his second paragraph, "To attain so acutely rich an art, Gris became a Cubist. More than a style, it was . . . a state of mind for him," your heart goes out to the poor lost pronoun eternally paging its antecedent. Such solecisms abound. Mr. Rosenthal's mention of Gris's "human portraits," for example, makes you curious to see the artist's pooch and kitty likenesses. And poems by both Reverdy and Mallarmé have been caricatured in translation.

In properly directing our attention to the deep symbolic significance of Gris's first "open window" painting, *Still Life Before an Open Window: Place Ravignan,* Mr. Rosenthal nonetheless overlooks its metaphorical relation to *The Sun-Blind* and to a later reprise of the sun-blind theme, *La Persienne.* Yet *Place Ravignan* is surely the most realized picture of this period—the spring of 1915—when Jean was in despair over wartime conditions. By now the French had suffered over three hundred thousand casualties, including many artists. Braque, whom Jean fairly worshipped, had been gravely wounded. Coal was in short supply, so the "Bateau Lavoir" (to which Josette and Jean had now returned) was often bitterly cold, and prices had risen steeply—bread, sugar, chocolate, and tobacco being stringently rationed. *Place Ravignan* is a busy, not terribly well-composed view across a cluttered table and through a window to the pollarded plane-trees of a little square. If it is rightly regarded as a masterpiece, that is largely because of the remarkable control of color-mood. Within a sultry blue Parisian dusk of

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the sort celebrated by poets from Baudelaire to Léon-Paul Fargue glows a sort of rosy bouquet of fragmented planes: never have cold and hot colors been so perfectly balanced on a single canvas. It is psychologically interesting, too, that the windows on the far side of the square are depicted from the outside, as if Jean were no longer wholly self-sequestered within interior space but could contemplate it now from without. Indeed, his spirits seemed to have evened perceptibly since Collioure. "I think I have really made progress recently and that my pictures begin to have a unity which they have lacked till now," he wrote to Kahnweiler, quite as if he had hitherto been the black sheep and laggard of the Cubist fold. "They are no longer those inventories of objects which used to depress me so much. But I still have to make an enormous effort to achieve what I have in mind. For I realize that although my ideas are well enough developed, my means of expressing them plastically are not. In short, I have not got an aesthetic, and this I can only acquire by experience."

Kahnweiler may well have wondered why Jean required the aesthetic if he was already able to produce the paintings. But the self-vindications did not stop there. When Kahnweiler told Jean to go ahead and sell some pictures on his own, he received from the painter this note of plaintive assurance: "Please don't think that I'm doing this simply to get more money."

In the summer of 1915 Jean painted *The Pot of Geraniums,* a brilliant jumble of colored planes merging through an open window into a sort of Andalusian landscape. The presence of *Le Figaro,* reclad in comic-opera pink-and-black, calls to mind the sprightly hair stylist and factotum of Seville. Several of Jean's favorite artifices are effectively deployed here: dot patterns from old-fashioned French ewer and basin sets, and various kinds of striation (wood grain, newspaper columns, etc.) distinguish and activate planes. In this sort of work one of the strongest assets of abstract-type painting was first exploited, namely the spontaneous balancing of strong diagonal contrasts. The geranium leaves, for example, have been flattened into a bold pattern whose top half can be read as one of those olive groves that crowd the Mediterranean littoral, straggling sleepily upward toward the sky. That this bright sky with its yellow sun lies on the upper side of the dark diagonal, and that it runs unhindered out the right side of the picture, tells us much about Jean's increasingly positive frame of mind.

Yet still he doubted. "Sometimes I feel that my way of painting is wholly mistaken," he wrote Kahnweiler. "I can't find room . . . for that sensitive and sensuous side which I feel should always be there . . . . Oh, how I wish I could convey the ease and charm of the unfinished! Well, it can't be helped! One must after all paint as one is oneself. My mind is too precise to allow me to tone down a blue or twist a straight line." And as the war drew to a standoff at Verdun, where a million young men were being slaughtered, the conscience-ridden Spaniard reacted with the utmost horror. What was "this urge to massacre, to exterminate?" Yet many of his finest pictures were created in the war's bleak concluding years, including the prismatic *Open Window* of 1917, in which the window is so elongated that you could walk right out and fly away.

In his creative work Gris frankly followed the lead of Picasso and Braque. (He called Picasso *cher maître* much to the latter's annoyance.) Yet, as has often been said, he surpassed them in certain respects. He had the natural designer's instinct for decisive arrangements in five or so value steps, and he resourcefully exploited color schemes that were as simple as they were sumptuous. Yet if one had to name the principal strength of his strongest period (roughly, 1914 to 1920), it would be his ability to fit planes together. He used any number of devices to achieve a playful rightness in the fit—overlappings, imbrications, interpenetrations, "rhymes"; what he largely avoided, as long as his power of invention held, was letting things baldly abut one another. Somewhere in *Divagations* Mallarmé speaks of "the shock of the mobilized inequality of words,"

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meaning the oblique and dramatic way they sometimes strike upon each other. The same can be said of the shocks in Gris's paintings: in his best work he never fudges such passages. "There is something equivocal about it" was his most damning criticism of a picture in progress.

By 1919 Jean had attained the height of his powers. Yet a certain congestion or constraint always circumscribed everything he did. His pictures were minor in theme and compressed in scale. He actually apologized for selling them. In most of his friendships he got the short end of the stick—Braque snubbed him, Picasso called him *la fille soumise* ("the dutiful daughter" or "registered prostitute"). And he even nursed an odd feeling that people like Kahnweiler thought his painting "better than it in fact is." Like a dancer who cannot leap very far, yet whose knowledge of how far he *can* leap permits him to attain an instant of weightless freedom, he performed wonderfully within a small magic circle. Brevity was the soul of the man; and rather suddenly, toward the end of the first year after the Armistice, the sad process of his own abbreviation began.

In December of 1919 Jean began to feel strangely tired, and by May of 1920 he was bedridden. "Josette sent a note informing me of his illness," wrote Kahnweiler in his life of Gris,

> which was at first thought to be pneumonia. In the end it developed into pleurisy. At the start Josette looked after him in the studio with great devotion and did everything possible. A sheet was stretched with string across the skylight to tone down the hardness of the light and shut out draughts. But, as his condition got worse, it was no longer possible to leave Gris in such unhygienic conditions amid dirt and discomfort. So he was moved to the Tenon Hospital . . . . Gris's room, luckily, was not unpleasant, and although he was very depressed he bore bravely and with resignation his long and complicated illness, the shattering cough, and the fixation abscess which was induced.

Warned to avoid the damp of Paris, Jean moved with Josette to the palmy town of Bandol on the Côte d'Azur, midway between La Ciotat and Toulon. From their lodgings at 4, rue Nationale they had a view of the quai du Port and the pretty bay. Unfortunately, Jean had been sent to one of the last century's most baneful "health resorts," a fact he was presently to discover when the *mistral* blew down the electric cables. "The sun is wonderful," he wrote to Kahnweiler, "but what a sinister landscape. Everything—the sea, the mountains—is as beautiful as can be, but how sad! We couldn't live in the house on which we had an option because it was in a narrow street with a tall house opposite and the rooms were dark. But we quickly found one room on the ground floor and beside the sea. It too is not very light, but it's more agreeable than the other place. It's rather badly furnished and costs a hundred francs but I've only paid for one month . . . . There's running water, a W.C. and electricity. Since yesterday, when the electric wiring was put in, I have counted four breakdowns. The temperature here is very agreeable, but in bright sunlight the countryside looks gloomy."

Jean's "gloomy" impression of the landscape was confirmed in a series of about eight "open window" paintings executed in 1921. The less successful of these, which have been omitted from the present show, depend on somewhat trite fan-shaped arrangements and theatrically swagged curtains (one recalls the sheet over Jean's skylight during the pleurisy episode). In the handsome *Open Window,* however, a whole range of grays is adroitly enlisted. Disconcertingly weak, however, is the way the landscape of sea and mountains recedes from the picture plane without any of the painter's earlier ingenious devices to knit it together with the foreground still life. Only a few clouds from the steely sky drift menacingly into the black interior, as if to pose a respiratory hazard. In Gris's earlier *Geranium* a black plane had been diagonally projected onto a sunny sky, but here a similar black plane—a window sash—hangs diagonally

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above the sky, enforcing a tragic mood. And is it too farfetched to read the guitar in this painting, like the many that were to follow, as a symbol of the respiratory organs, neck, and vocal chords? There is evidence that Jean had become obsessed with the theme of suffocation. "Man dies of suffocation in water and a fish in air," he wrote in a letter of that year to Amédée Ozenfant. "Yet both have respiratory organs, though one only functions in the element air, and the other only in the element water. The same applies to the objects in my paintings: if you try to make them live in a world where they do not belong they will die. They will even die if you try to take them out of one picture and put them into another. They will die just as an object from the natural world would die in a painted world. You can't claim there's anything fantastic about giving each object . . . a respiratory organ which functions in a particular set of circumstances."

From this period forward Jean would live in the twilight world of the chronically ill, shambling with Josette from resort to resort in search of breathable air. Afflicted by a bewildering variety of symptoms, he suffered most terribly from what seemed a pathological respiratory condition. Under these circumstances the recurrent open-window symbol of his pictures bears a frightening and ghastly construction. Seen through this window, the coves and mountains of the Alpes-Maritimes look leaden and forbidding, and the sky by degrees becomes opaque. Here and there a white sail points toward the heavens, as if in a gesture of communion with the tubercular Antoine Watteau, painter of *The Embarkation for Cythera*; and Watteau's pitiful harlequin Gilles also makes a frequent appearance. Only seldom does Jean regain a measure of his former balance. In the darkly obsessive *View Across the Bay* of 1921 everything—wood, sea, sky, musical staves, and guitar strings—has been transformed into flowing yet oddly static striations like outcroppings of slate or combed-out hair (one recalls that he had once combed his paint on the canvas). This picture bears the legend *Le Pet,* a foul-air joke.

In 1923-24 Jean wandered back and forth between the Beausoleil quarter of Monte Carlo below the Moyenne Corniche (where he worked on settings and costumes for Diaghilev between bouts of respiratory misery) and the Paris suburb of Boulogne-sur-Seine, where Kahnweiler lived. In 1924 he was operated on for an anal fistula. In 1925-26 he felt progressively ill and began to run spiking fevers every afternoon. He was advised by his doctor not to worry and to rest, but in February of 1926 he took a bronchial infection followed by anemia. By midsummer the spiking fevers had worsened, and in August he fell seriously ill again, perhaps with typhoid fever. X rays taken in October showed a "weak lung" and mountain air was recommended. In November he and Josette settled in at the Villa Germinal at Hyères, another palmy town on the Riviera. Despite the stunning view down over the anchorage and out toward the Îles d'Or, the place seemed "haunted," as Kahnweiler put it, "by the ghost of many an English spinster who [had] died there of consumption." It was also not very high, and buffeted by the mistral in spring and the sirocco in summer. Almost immediately Jean came down with tonsillitis, then bronchitis again, then—as it seemed—emphysema. His blood pressure rose alarmingly, and something very much like asthma prevented him from lying down at night. He consumed a great deal of morphine.

During this late period Jean was not unaware that his creative powers had declined. Already in December of 1923 he had written Kahnweiler: "I am very upset to hear your opinion of my pictures. Alas, you have merely confirmed my own fears . . . . Don't hesitate to destroy them if you think they are not worthy of me . . . ." Indeed, he had seemed to contemplate the destruction of more than his pictures: once he became involved in an experiment to stop his heartbeat, much to Kahnweiler's alarm.

Jean's last painting was *Woman with a Basket.* The woman—Muse or Fate—stands

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before an oval window whose surface, like a bottomless pool's, reflects a cold black. She is turning toward it in the posture of a mother cradling a baby, though what she really carries is a basket of fruit. One piece of fruit has been cut open and glows with a muted warmth. The osier of the basket is looped and plaited like tresses of rich soft hair; its rim describes an infant-sized lower-case "g." The cycle of the window paintings—from the yearning vitality of *The Sun-Blind* to this—had now been closed.

On December 20, 1926, Jean wrote Kahnweiler that since his arrival in the Midi he had been having "attacks of asthma which cause me much pain . . . . I am so afraid of these attacks that I hardly dare move." Ten days later he reported a leap in his blood pressure. With the vigilant ingenuity of friendship Kahnweiler detected that something was very wrong. In early January he wrote Jean to inquire if the climate of Hyères might not actually be bad for him. "Far from getting better, your health seems to be less good down there. As for the asthma, you never had it before. Why not go somewhere else?" Jean apparently concurred, for he soon moved with Josette to the Hôtel Laugier in Puget-Théniers, an ancient village in a lovely valley much higher in the Alpes-Maritimes. There an obscure young doctor at once diagnosed Jean's illness as uremia.

Jean died, aged forty, on May 11, 1927. The irony of it was that he succumbed not to some respiratory ailment but to kidney failure: as the country doctor seems to have observed, there was overwhelming evidence that he had been suffering for many years from a chronic renal problem or a weak heart or both, and that his painful breathing was merely a somewhat misleading symptom of such an underlying condition.

Like Mozart and Keats and so many others before him, Gris was one of those exceptionally energetic, talented, and attractive figures in the annals of art who died very young. Despite his great modesty and penchant for self-effacing friendship he painted pictures of a highly personal strength and charm. One wonders of course whether his long-hidden disease partly shaped his artistic temperament. It is enough to say that the onslaught of a fatal illnes was mirrored in the imagery of his pictures. Can it be that the concision and restraint of his procedure reflected a deep indwelling knowledge of a fatal flaw in his constitution? Or was that constitution, sound at the start of his career, slowly worn away by a melancholy he was powerless to master?

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Theater

Tennessee Williams and the fiddle in the wings

by Mimi Kramer

Five minutes into John Dexter's revival of *The Glass Menagerie* it had become apparent that something was wrong. The audience was laughing. Not laughing out of hostility or derision, but laughing the way people do when they think someone has just said something funny, before they realize that it isn't meant to be funny at all.

Tom was talking to the audience, which always comes as a surprise in itself. For what one remembers about *The Glass Menagerie* are its characters (the forlorn sister and the impossibly domineering mother), the fiery exchanges between mother and son, the little glass animals that keep breaking at opportune moments, and a lot of fuss being made about a "gentleman caller." One tends to forget that it is Tom who begins and ends the play and that the scenes we see enacted between Amanda, Tom, Laura, and the Gentleman Caller are presented as Tom's memories of something that happened a long time ago in another city.

Tom's opening monologue, and his closing piece, contain some of the best writing Williams ever did. And Williams at his best is quite good. But Williams at his best is also fairly rare, given his propensity for crude symbolism, his tendency to drift toward the precious and the self-indulgent, his seemingly endless capacity to be easily impressed with himself and with the hollow reverberations of his own deep-sounding pronouncements. For Williams, even stage directions, even instructions to the set designer, were pregnant with meaning. The Wingfield apartment in *The Glass Menagerie,* for example,

> faces an alley and is entered by a fire escape, a structure whose name is a touch of accidental poetic truth, for all of these huge buildings are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation.

Traces of sententiousness are certainly not absent from the opening sequence of the play, but on the whole they are kept to a minimum, and thank goodness: the opening sequence of *The Glass Menagerie,* in my opinion, is the one really solid theatrical idea Williams ever had. Tom's monologue, in addition to setting the stage and establishing the mood of the whole piece, provides the perspective from which we are to view the play. It relegates the world of depression-era St. Louis and the Wingfield apartment to a place somewhere between truth and the slightly distorted fiction that events in the past can become. If Laura and Amanda are not "realistic" characters, that is not only because they live in a world peopled by glass animals and non-existent suitors, but also because we see them through the filter of Tom's memory and memory is not the medium of reality but of imagination, regret, self-justification, guilt—the whole spectrum of emotional colors through which we view the past. This is one of the few pieces of truth that Williams ever hit on, and it is what

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makes *The Glass Menagerie* a good play rather than just a pleasantly sentimental period piece. Williams uses Tom's monologue to warn us against taking the little domestic drama we see enacted at face value.

> I am the narrator of the play, and also a character in it. The other characters are my mother, Amanda, my sister Laura, and a gentleman caller who appears in the final scenes. He is the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from. But since I have a poet's weakness for symbols, I am using this character also as a symbol; he is the long-delayed but always expected something that we live for.

It's a bit self-conscious, yes, but with gentle pacing and a light, self-deprecating tone a clever actor ought to be able to manage it.

> [*Music begins to play.*]
>
> The play is memory. Being a memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic. In memory everything seems to happen to music. That explains the fiddle in the wings.

It's not a funny line, not intentionally anyway. It is the sort of line one can imagine Williams writing and then leaning back to draw on a cigarette, thinking with satisfaction of its powerful simplicity and of the quiet smiles of approval it would elicit from an intelligent audience, an audience capable of recognizing truth mixed with wit, irony, and poetic imagination.

From the audience at the Eugene O'Neill Theater the line brought forth a delighted hoot. "That was a good one, that was!" the laughter seemed to say. "Didn't know this was going to be a comedy!" Then, raggedy, the laughter subsided into confused silence. They had laughed once earlier, at an unexpectedly empty and ungainly image: "the huge middle class of America . . . matriculating in a school for the blind . . . having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy." This, too, they had honestly taken for a joke and had been embarrassed. The third time the audience cracked up, though, it happened to be over a line I have always rather liked. Tom, having come to the end of the list of characters, begins to describe his father:

> There is a fifth character in the play who doesn't appear except in this larger than life-size photograph over the mantel. This is our father who left us a long time ago. He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distances; he gave up his job at the telephone company and skipped the light fantastic out of town . . . .

"A telephone man who fell in love with long distances": now that is an awfully good line, good because its cleverness creeps up on you rather than knocking you unconscious. Why the audience at the Eugene O'Neill Theater found it funny I will never know; but Tom, who had begun looking rather more haunted than the part actually calls for, finished his speech off at a clip. The first line after that is, fortunately, Amanda's. "Tom?" she calls from the table where she and Laura are just sitting down to their evening meal. Tom takes leave of the audience with a polite bow and goes to take his place among the actors in the play. The minute Jessica Tandy opened her mouth everyone perked up, so it looked as though everything was going to be all right after all. But it wasn't.

Tennessee Williams's plays are full of "fiddles in the wings"—and I don't mean someone sawing a violin offstage. If the opening of *The Glass Menagerie* works structurally but is verbally close to an embarrassment, that is not an aberration. The fact is that as a playwright Williams combined an unusual talent for thinking in theatrical terms with an extraordinary lack of literary sensibility. It is scarcely possible to read a single one of his plays without coming on something—some embarrassing flight of verbal fancy—that makes you blush for him and want to hide your face. The main body of Williams's work is riddled with them, from small errors of

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judgment—the Mexican woman who pops up in *A Streetcar Named Desire* babbling "Flores, flores para los muertos"—to whole plays, like *The Rose Tattoo, Camino Real, Sweet Bird of Youth,* and *Orpheus Descending,* that really amount to no more than huge lapses of taste. Here, for example, is a passage from *The Purification*:

> Knocking down walls
> with two
> blue
> brutal
> bare fists
> clenched over quicksilver
>
> could ever—
> could certainly never—enclose
> such longing as was my sister's!
>
> How much less night, fearlessly stating with
> stars
> that breathless inflection—
> Forever?

The so-called acting version of *The Glass Menagerie* calls for a sort of multi-media effect using a slide projector to cast "images or titles" at appropriate moments in the play on "a section of wall between the front-room and the dining-room area." The purpose of this device, as Williams explained in his production notes is "to give accent to certain values in each scene." Thus, the script for Scene Four reads like this:

> TOM [*gently*]: What is it, Mother, that you want to discuss?
> AMANDA: *Laura!*
> [TOM *puts his cup down slowly.*]
> [Legend on screen: "Laura."]
> TOM: —Oh.—Laura . . .

If Williams had had his way, every time Laura reminisces about "Blue Roses," the Gentleman Caller's old nickname for her, an image of blue roses would have appeared on the screen. Most directors wisely follow the original Broadway production in choosing not to notice the playwright's recommendation here. Williams wrote that, for various reasons, he did not "regret the omission of this device" from the original New York production. I dare say he was not the only one. (The audience for the 1983 revival is not so lucky. Although John Dexter does not follow the playscript to the letter, he finds nothing wrong with clarifying Laura's feelings when she goes to open the door to Tom and the Gentleman Caller: "Terror!" reads the screen over the stage.)

Williams's explanation for the importance of this device offers an insight into the Classic Comics terms in which he instinctively thought:

> Each scene contains a particular point (or several) which is structurally the most important . . . . The legend or image upon the screen will strengthen the effect of what is merely allusion in the writing and allow the primary point to be made more simply and lightly than if the entire responsibility were on the spoken lines.

I like that word "lightly"! Slapping the word "Annunciation" across a stage flat was Williams's notion of subtlety.

A writer of few ideas to begin with, Williams played over the several themes that did engage his imagination almost without interruption or variation. Loneliness, desperation, and vague intimations of mortality were his windows on the soul, and the vista they afforded him amounted to a rather addled view that sex is somehow at the bottom of everything, that—as Stella tells Blanche in *Streetcar*—"there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark—that sort of make everything else seem—unimportant."

Williams, however, not content with the literary opportunity that sexual realism offered him, always groping hotly after greater implications, imbued his vision of sexuality with the oozing mysticism that makes much of his writing so cloying. The women in his plays are never pregnant: their bellies are "rounding slightly with new maternity" and they whirl and stagger about the stage—like

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Serafina in *The Rose Tattoo* and Lady in *Orpheus Descending*—shouting "I have conceived! Two lives again in the body!" and "I have life in my body! This dead tree, my body, has burst into flower!"

Such writing is the product not of poetic imagination but of arrested development. Take an all-consuming desire to be admired as a great playwright and mix it with a perennially adolescent outlook: it is the perfect recipe for pretentious melodrama and most of Williams's work is just that. Things happen in his plays that happen nowhere else in the world with such rhythmic regularity and they are raised to the status of universal truths rather than relegated to the realm of the outrageous or unusual. The rapes leading to insanity, the abortions leading to barrenness, the homosexuality leading to suicide, the loneliness leading to nymphomania—such things do happen certainly, but they don't all happen to the same people, or in the same melodramatic way. Neurotics do not go slowly mad to the strains of "Varsouviana" playing in the distance.

They do, however, suffer from reminiscence, and they do touch up the truth in their visions of the past. That is what makes *The Glass Menagerie* different from the formless mass of Williams's other work: whatever is not quite believable can be refiltered by the audience through Tom's romantic nostalgia.

Unfortunately, the current production fails miserably in this regard, which is partly the result of casting "personalities" who cannot act (like Amanda Plummer) or who no longer need to (like Jessica Tandy) and so only play themselves. As the ethereal Laura ("like a piece of her own glass," wrote Williams, redundantly as usual, "too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf"), Amanda Plummer is very far from a vision of inestimable sadness: with her hoarse, unmodulated voice, her distracting lisp, and her golly-gee-yuk-yuk tone, which she seems incapable of varying, she gave the impression, far from being pathologically shy, of being perhaps not quite shy enough. Bruce Davison's Tom was every mother's son, affectionate, attentive, and respectful. At every moment you expected him to burst into a round of "M is for the million things she gave me . . ." and was it any wonder? Jessica Tandy was playing Irene Dunn in *I Remember Mama,* a paragon of sweet reasonableness, concerned for her children and eager for their happiness. Oh, she nagged a bit, but what mother wouldn't have with such children? One wept with her for youth today: no interest in paying the electricity bill or in raising a family, thinking they've been put here on earth to go to the movies and sit around playing old phonograph records. What's a mother to do?

Tandy's performance—which incidentally is not peculiar to this production: twenty years ago she read the part exactly the same way on the Howard Sackler recording—does more than tamper with the dynamics of the play. It actively changes it. It was as if Tandy had been called in to avenge the ghost of Amanda Wingfield, maligned and branded for nearly forty years as a harridan and a shrew.

Of course Amanda Wingfield does not need Jessica Tandy to rescue her from ignominy. Intelligently played, Amanda, like all slightly self-deluded characters who live primarily in the world of a better and fairer past, moves between the faintly noble and the faintly absurd. But she does have a penchant for playacting, and an exasperating habit of turning every mundane situation into a minor domestic tragedy with herself as long-suffering victim. She is the Jewish Mother turned coloratura and gone south for the winter. Sure, any mother would be incensed on discovering that her daughter had secretly dropped out of business college weeks before! That's fifty dollars down the drain and what *does* the hopeless girl plan to do? But Amanda takes four histrionic pages to get to the point, running through a whole repertoire of hackneyed theatrical gestures along the way: she "leans against the door and stares at Laura with a martyred look"; "continuing the sweet, suffering stare," she

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lets her hat and gloves "fall on the floor—a bit of acting"; she picks up Laura's typing chart, "holds it in front of her a second, staring at it sweetly and sorrowfully—then bites her lips and tears it in two pieces," and so on. If Jessica Tandy did these things, she did them so unobtrusively that no one noticed.

With a little help, playing Amanda this way can do a lot of damage to *The Glass Menagerie,* especially to the final scene, which rests on the juxtaposition of the melodramatic and the mundane. Amanda, when the Gentleman Caller turns out to have a girlfriend at the depot, immediately becomes the center of another tin-pot tragedy and is eager to lay the blame: she weeps, she cries, she tears her hair. Reproaches and recriminations fly. *We* know, however, because we have seen what happened, that there is no blame to be laid, just as there is no real tragedy: an ordinary young man—one of those ordinary young men with sunny dispositions and lots of boyish charm—flirted with Laura in the careless way that self-assured young men with lots of boyish charm flirt with girls who need to be "drawn out." Properly played, the Gentleman Caller's flirtation should be entirely innocent, almost unconscious. He should saunter in and saunter out unchanged and unaware that anything in the house has been changed by his progress through it. John Heard's Gentleman Caller seemed to have blundered into the wrong theater from an O'Neill play. He brought to the part a whole casebook of motivations for leading poor Laura along and crept out of the house like the Ancient Mariner devastated by the harm he had done. This boy, you knew, would never flirt again! So heavy did the tragic gloom hang over his departure that Amanda's reaction seemed entirely appropriate, right in keeping with the reasonableness that Tandy had been giving her all along. The audience had no reason to contrast Amanda's histrionics with the very real pathos of Laura's situation: her circumstances have not really changed, but she might have kept her illusions.

More than anything else, *The Glass Menagerie* is a play about lost illusions: Amanda's, Laura's, and Tom's. But the last illusion the play shatters is the audience's. Throughout the play, Amanda is the center of dramatic attention because she makes herself the martyr of every situation. Laura, a pale shadow of background insignificance, is important only as a pawn in Amanda's self-dramatizing plans and fantasies. No one who talks to Laura is ever really concentrating on her: even the Gentleman Caller is more intent on impressing himself than the girl he is talking to ("I happened to notice you had this inferiority complex . . ."). Laura does briefly become the focus of attention, at the beginning of Scene Four, when she slips on the fire escape and falls, but even here she only becomes the excuse for a temporary rapprochement in the ongoing row between Tom and Amanda, the central conflict that ends in Tom's departure.

When Tom slams out of the house at the end of the play in response to Amanda's "Go to the moon, you selfish dreamer!" he lingers on the fire escape for a moment, then turns to face the audience:

> I didn't go to the moon, I went much further . . . . I traveled round a good deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves . . . . I would have stopped, but I was pursued by something.

If we are about to find out that Tom's dreams of adventure and release have come to nothing, we naturally assume that Amanda is the cause. Amanda, after all, is what Tom wanted to escape; if something pursues him it must be some lingering sense of filial guilt. It comes as a surprise, therefore, when halfway through the final speech it turns out to be the sister, not the mother, who is pursuing Tom:

> Perhaps I am walking along a street at night, in some strange city, before I have found companions. I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of colored glass . . . . Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn and look into her eyes.

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Needless to say, the last scene of the current production did not register shock as it should have. With Tandy playing Mary Poppins and Amanda Plummer playing the Elephant Man, with Tom playing the Gentleman Caller and the Gentleman Caller playing Tom, your attention had been drawn to entirely the wrong people. Why is it, then, that two weeks after seeing *The Glass Menagerie* I still see the closing image in my mind?

The answer has to do with that part of theater—perhaps the biggest part—which is visual. In this production, Ming Cho Lee's set for the Wingfield apartment and the fire escape took up, at a guess, about three quarters of the stage, with the dim suggestion of a tenement building rising behind it to distorted heights. The rest of the stage to the left, where Tom usually stood when he addressed the audience, was space, just empty space, and a backdrop painted with impossibly feathery clouds against a sky the color of blue you've never actually seen, but, thinking back, always remember.

The final scene had been so grossly misplayed and misdirected that the delicately ironic nonevent to which the play builds up (so the Gentleman Caller turned out to have a girlfriend at the depot: so what? "Lot's of fellows meet girls whom they don't marry, mother!") had been reduced to so much Louisiana melodrama. But while Tom had been speaking to the audience you had forgotten this. Amanda was going about the apartment turning down the lights and she and Laura had arranged themselves in a sentimental tableau. No matter that it was the wrong tableau, that Laura now is meant to be alone on stage. By now you had had time to forget that it was Jessica Tandy and Amanda Plummer sitting there; you forgot to notice the places in Tom's speech where Tennessee Williams waxes eloquent or Bruce Davison's hokey gesture, blowing a farewell kiss.

> Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be. I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger—anything that can blow your candles out! For nowadays the world is lit by lightning!

As Laura bent over the candles, putting them out one by one, you saw only—and days afterward remembered—a lone figure gazing back into the half-light at a vanishing tableau.

"Blow out your candles, Laura—and so, goodbye!" Tennessee Williams was no great playwright, but he did think, occasionally, in visual theatrical terms, which is more than you can say for half a score of people who insist on writing plays these days. To write well is certainly something, and it is something Williams certainly could do only rarely. But it is also something to write a play that, however far from greatness, and however badly presented, has got to *be* a play and is well worth reviving in a huge Broadway theater at all the expense that a Broadway theater can command. It is something to leave an audience with an image that, hovering about the edges of judgment, lingers on long after the sound of an ill-tempered bow, straining for a melody that no one willingly would hear, has died away.

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Music

Messiaen at the Opéra

by Patrick J. Smith

On Monday, November 28, the ornate Second Empire Palais Garnier in Paris, home of the Paris Opéra, was the scene of an unusual event: the world premiere of an opera by the elder statesman of French composers, Olivier Messiaen, entitled *Saint François d'Assise*. The opera, the 75-year-old Messiaen's first (and almost certainly last) such work, was presented before an audience of the composer's partisans and friends, critics from Europe and the United States, and the usual sprinkling of official figures, not least among them the Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris, Jean-Marie Lustiger, who professed afterward not to have been an instant bored by the almost five hours of music. On Thursday, there followed the inaugural gala of the opera before *le tout Paris, tenue de soirée obligée* (in black or white tie). The opening was followed by six further performances, most of the tickets for which had been sold far in advance.

The event was unusual for several reasons. The Opéra presents very few operatic world premieres, and even fewer of French operas. Messiaen himself, though doubtless a major presence in French music and in contemporary music (as the teacher of, among others, Boulez and Stockhausen), had never shown any inclination for the stage, and had to be resolutely cajoled by the then Opéra director, Rolf Liebermann, before finally agreeing in 1974 to undertake the commission. Even then, the betting among the Parisian cynics was that the opera would never be finished, or if somehow finished, never produced by the Opéra.

The tale told in Paris, however, is that one fine day Bernard Lefort, Liebermann's successor, looked up from his paperwork to see Messiaen in his office, bearing the completed manuscript. In keeping with the hagiography of Messiaen's vision of Saint Francis one should doubtless believe the tale, although to a rational skeptic it is highly unlikely that Messiaen or anyone could have managed to carry more than a fraction of something so immense as the complete orchestral score. At all events, it was not until the present regime of Massimo Bogianckino that the opera was finally planned, cast, scheduled, rehearsed, and performed.

And yet the "événement colossale," as one French newspaper dubbed it, was really not that unusual, given the background of opera in France. The history of opera in France revolves around the fact that opera, from the time of Lully, has been a state monopoly; the Opéra was considered the musical counterpart to the Comédie-Française for stage works and the Académie française for the written word. Thus, a composer had to achieve a production at the Opéra in order properly to come to the attention of the intelligentsia, and through these worthies to the attention of the French nation. Yet the French, for all their cultural arrogance, have finally never appreciated music to the same degree that they have the spoken theater

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(either in its histrionic, poetic, or melodramatic guise), the spectacle show, or intrigue in general. The most successful composers of opera were those who could best work in this atmosphere of byzantine bureaucracy, shifting loyalties, and continual flattery. Surprisingly, transplanted foreigners such as Lully, Cherubini, Spontini, and Meyerbeer were often more adept than the French at such manipulations.

It is a fact of French musical life that French composers have usually felt it necessary to write at least one opera (often of grandiose proportions), whether or not they were gifted with the instinct for musical drama or with any urgency for dramatic musical expression. Perhaps this was because the French master of music was expected, like Mozart, to be a master of every kind of music; perhaps, too, an ingrained weakness for theater and for spectacle infects all French creators. I suspect the reason is even more simple: an operatic success, before *le tout Paris,* would mean more to a career than a dozen well-received quartets or symphonies. So true is this state of affairs that even Henri Duparc, who exists in music history because he composed the highest proportion of worthy music to minuscule output—a bare twenty works, most of them songs—wrote (and destroyed) part of an opera.

This situation has produced, over the years, a landscape of beached whales: operas containing enough memorable music to elicit regular demands for revival but which, usually for lack of stage-dramatic vitality, remain as touchstones for the connoisseur rather than being even on the fringes of the repertory. Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande,* though sometimes close to repertory status, has often seemed the chief such example. But there are many others, from the spectacles of Lully and Rameau to the later nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century operas, among them Lalo's *Le Roi d'Ys,* Charpentier's *Louise* (where the problem lies with the music rather than the drama), Fauré's *Pénélope,* Dukas's *Ariane et Barbe-bleue,* and Milhaud's *Christophe Colomb.*

In this specifically French context, the commissioning of an opera from Olivier Messiaen becomes more understandable, although it took a non-French impresario to have the wit, courage or audacity to suggest it to the composer. Rolf Liebermann, a composer of opera as well as an administrator who was brought to Paris in the early 1970s by President Georges Pompidou in order to renew the moribund Opéra, felt that Messiaen was the ideal French composer to set the seal on an operatic renaissance. It was fitting that, at *Saint François*'s premiere, Liebermann sat next to Messiaen and Messiaen's wife, the pianist Yvonne Loriod.

As a composer, Messiaen is something of a paradox. He is, and always has been, a devout Catholic, seeking to reproduce in music the rapture and ecstasy he finds in his religion. A great deal of his *oeuvre* over the years has been written for the organ, an instrument associated with the church and well out of the compositional mainstream today. His religious feelings, however, extend beyond ordinary contemplation of the numinous. His music can be life-embracing, as in the early *Turangalîla* Symphony (1946-48). It can find its subject in the majestic scenic landscapes of Bryce Canyon and Zion National Park, as in *Des canyons aux étoiles* (1974). Pre-eminently, it finds outlet in Messiaen's lifelong passion for the varieties of bird song, a passion which has resulted in assorted compositions involving catalogues of songs of birds from around the world. Indeed, the best-known photograph of the composer is the one of him standing in the middle of a field sporting his *béret basque,* listening to the birds.

Normally, this devotion would have produced a composer of parochial scope, a sort of French Bruckner, whose works might have appealed mainly to a cult élite. Yet Messiaen's compositional rigor—quite at the opposite pole from the music's rapt and sonorous wonder—brought its minute and calculated explorations of varieties of rhythm and of timbre into the compositional world

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inhabited by Schoenberg, Webern, and even Elliott Carter. The technique of Messiaen's works is staggeringly complex and exact, and the sheer intellectual wizardry of the construction of his compositions had a powerful appeal to the post-serialists of the 1950s and 1960s. Messiaen's music could thus engage in discourse on various levels concurrently.

Messiaen therefore occupied a curious and uneasy position between the worlds of the disciplined and the rhapsodic, and this unease is evident to all who try to come to terms with his music-making. This unease, moreover, has called forth a skepticism as to his convictions, a skepticism taken to its extreme in the last interview given by the late pianist Paul Jacobs (in the December, 1983 *Keynote*), in which he compared Messiaen's music (which Jacobs played often and very well), to the work of a Tartuffe—a musical impostor. This is certainly too strong; yet there is something about Messiaen's music, as there is not about the music of Bruckner, which is disturbingly secular—even sounding to some not just banal and pious but outright fake.

This is in part because of Messiaen's musical language. Messiaen's debts to the timbral qualities of Berlioz are clear, as are his debts to African tribal rhythms, the sounds and rhythms of the Indonesian gamelan orchestra (the battery of xylophones, marimbas, xylorimbas, and vibraphones is at the core of his orchestrations), plus the rhythms of Indian ragas. These and the rhythms and pitches of bird song constitute his primary storehouse of musical devices. Yet, in addition, and from an aural standpoint centrally, Messiaen has learned the lesson of blatant vulgarity in music from someone otherwise as distant as Mahler, and he never hesitates to employ it.

Virgil Thomson has described Messiaen's more overtly juicy religious sounds as coming "from the Hollywood cornfields," and indeed it is difficult to know exactly whether Messiaen intends these moments in all seriousness or whether he is trying to compel belief through a kind of Zen misdirection. One of his favorite devices is the slide whistle (or a slide whistle simulacrum produced by Messiaen's beloved *ondes Martenot*). This grating sound always has an extreme shock effect, since it is totally outside the timbral context of the moment. In the opera, this effect is used to represent contact between earthly yearning and heavenly grace. The immediate reaction of an untutored listener, however, is that someone in the audience has let loose a Bronx cheer.

There is no doubt that *Saint François d'Assise,* whatever works might follow it, represents Messiaen's *summum musico-theologicum.* The subject of Saint Francis, with his love of all sentient beings, his essential otherworldliness within this world, his close identification with Christ culminating in his receiving of the stigmata, was inevitable for Messiaen. For this reason alone the premiere at the Palais Garnier was justified.

Yet the opera does not represent a new departure, or an advance on Messiaen's previous work. It is merely a continuation of what has come before. It possesses neither the Verdian refinement of *Otello* or *Falstaff* nor the Wagnerian distillation of *Parsifal.* In its own right, *Saint François d'Assise* is infuriating, for it demands an almost complete acceptance of Messiaen's essentially static, undeveloping aesthetic over a six-hour (intermissions included) span. Messiaen's obsessions with timbre—the exact sounds of instruments and instrumental combinations—and with rhythm may vary, but for the listener the ultimate effect is one of poise and serenity. The leitmotifs Messiaen employs, deliberately kept simple (the one for Saint Francis is of seven notes, with a "tail" of four or five more), are endlessly repeated. Even when at times varied or suggested through opaque scoring, they are always perceptible in their original form. What you hear is what is there, from the stark Cecil B. DeMille brass fanfares to the riffs of the marimbas and the hammerstrokes on the tam-tam or the tubular bells.

Messiaen's is a concept of music proceeding by blocks of discrete sounds set one next

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to the other, with each block never meant to extend into the next. Development, either the polyphonic variety of Palestrina or Bach or the motivic production of Beethoven, is eschewed. It is not just, as someone afterward said to me, that the opera cannot be analysed according to the method of Heinrich Schenker, since there are no middle- or backgrounds, and no germ cells out of which the music grows. Still worse, Messiaen's music, for all its spiritual and intellectual ambitions, all too often sounds short-winded and fragmentary.

It is true that this reliance on simplicity and repetition has points of contact with today's minimalist music. While it can be said that Messiaen engages in variation writing, his are quite different from the Goldberg Variations of Bach or the Diabelli of Beethoven. In the work of Messiaen, the original material is not only latent but audible in the transformations; the process is not one of ongoing development, but of separate and discrete reference to the original. Here, it is not progress that is sought but the stasis of inner explication or of wonder. Messiaen's added ingredient, of course, is the religious one: a concentration on the immediate, and, through that, on the ultimate. Just as one can see the universe in a grain of sand, or God in the petals of a rose or in the song of the morning lark, Messiaen attempts to reach God through the moment of sound and the recall of repeated material.

The extended time frame of such blocks of sound is partly that of the endless Eastern musics reinterpreted by such Western composers as La Monte Young, but, more centrally to Messiaen, it is the time frame of the Catholic mystic repeating his litanies, or the churchgoer saying his beads. The process is meant to be simple, direct, and rhapsodic. Once rapture is achieved, one can continue endlessly in its contemplation.

All of *Saint François d'Assise* is predicated on these assumptions. It is not an opera in any traditional sense (though the composer insists that it needs visual coloristic reinforcement and is therefore not an oratorio). The text, by Messiaen himself, is subtitled

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scènes franciscaines and consists of eight tableaux. Three tableaux make up the first act (one hour and forty minutes), three the second (two hours), and two the last (just over an hour). The music resides largely in the outsized orchestra, which continually comments on the text. Messiaen has been very careful to pare down the orchestration during the singing, and the singing itself is of a conjunct, ongoing vocal line possibly reminiscent of Debussian declamation but more related to liturgical chant. It is a blessing that the music for voice is relatively simple, for the central role of Francis, who appears in seven of the eight scenes, must be the longest role in all of opera—as long as that of Wotan in at least two of the first three operas of the *Ring* cycle. Francis rightly dominates the opera, as did the Francis of the performance I heard, the Belgian bass-baritone José van Dam (though I would not like to have heard the state of his voice by the final evening).

Messiaen's Francis is not the Francis of secular history, nor of operatic dramaturgy, but of hagiography. We do not see Francis in his hellion youth, in his period of hermitic doubt, in his travels in the Holy Land and his work in the Crusades. We do not see his battles with the church or with the brotherhood he founded. Francis is from the first in a state of grace, discoursing with his brothers (with interjections from the neutral chorus). In the third scene, he confronts one area of doubt: his revulsion for the leprous. By its end, aided by the intervention of an angel, he can approach the leper and, saying, "Pardon, my son, I have not loved you enough," can kiss him, thus curing him of his illness.

In the second act (fourth tableau) the angel comes to the Franciscan brothers but is not recognized until the very end of the tableau. In the fifth tableau, the angel appears to Francis and plays celestial music to him on the viol: Francis faints in ecstasy. In the sixth, Francis instructs a brother in the songs of various birds, and ends by preaching to the birds.

The first tableau of the third act shows Francis receiving the stigmata. This is the most overtly dramatic moment on the stage, and well defines that characteristic of Messiaen's music which Thomson has termed "the determination to produce somewhere in every piece an apotheosis destined at once to open up the heavens and to bring down the house." For Francis, as we know, the receiving of the stigmata was an intensely private experience, and one he went to great lengths to hide from even his closest followers. For Messiaen, however, it is a thoroughly public event.

In the last scene Francis dies, after receiving the angel and the cured leper. Father Leo, his confessor, says, "He is gone like a butterfly, a golden butterfly which flies from the Cross to traverse the stars," and the chorus, now become the multisonorous voice of God, chants alleluias, while the orchestra gathers itself into a final, transcendent, shining "mystic chord" of ecstasy, which is held and held, as the marimbas and xylophones glissando up and down.

The problem is clear. How are we to make the leap of faith from the text, doggedly naïve and simplistic, through the music, doggedly static and rapt, to the infinite expanse of Messiaen's musical and spiritual home? It cannot be achieved through ongoing momentum of drama—there is none in the work—and it cannot be achieved through the many moments of timbral or motivic brilliance, for by their very nature these manifestations are kept penned up and never allowed to develop. One must be, for the entire course of the work, on the opera's wavelength, or else somehow be seduced to it, for otherwise the experience will become, as someone put it, like being stuck in Sunday traffic on the Long Island Expressway knowing that there is no exit.

For me, the first act was slow in starting but the most enjoyable musically, mainly because of the evident rigor of its composition. The fifth tableau (which I assume will be, together with the bird sermon and the stigmata scene, the one to be excerpted in concert) worked exactly as it should have. At the moment the angel plays the celestial

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viol, Messiaen scores the sounds for three hushed *ondes Martenot,* sounding like glass harmonicas and underlaid with an offstage (miked) women's chorus. The effect is indeed transcendent: the music of the spheres brought to earth, not so much timeless as outside of time. I wanted it to continue forever.

The bird-sermon scene—the longest in the opera—was unendurable (it was the only one booed, though lightly), in part because of its inordinate length and staticity, in part because the polyphony of birds (despite the use of aleatoric music for *ondes Martenot,* a first for Messiaen) represented no distinct departure from the bird song written before (although here Messiaen cast the scene into the framework of an antiphonal dialogue between man and birds), and in part because it came at the end of a two-hour act that exceeded my quota of the ineffable.

The last act I found a distinct disappointment, though it must be said in its defense that several critics thought otherwise. The stigmata scene, in its use of the Hollywood string sound that had blessedly been absent from the first two acts, displayed Messiaen's penchant for vulgarity. This sentimental Christologic writing (derived straight from the boulevard religiosity of Jules Massenet) can easily make one's flesh crawl. The staged laser effects, used to indicate the receiving of the wounds of Christ, were again too Hollywood for my taste.

By the last scene I had turned off Messiaen's radio. I confess to finding most death scenes in opera too long—even Violetta's—but this one surpassed all bounds, with the saint-to-be constantly sticking his head up once again for another word, while the music indulged in a series of cadential chords that, rather than progressing toward a close, wandered aimlessly about the sonic countryside in search of a resolution. And then, with Francis dead, Messiaen had to have his *apothéose.* This is historically correct, since French music glories in its *apothéoses*—even Berlioz gave Marguérite her choral moment after Faust was ridden to hell.

Curiously or not, then, *Saint François d'Assise* is a work squarely in the French tradition. Curiously, as a religious work in the context of a proudly secular French state, it continues a tradition going back at least to the last French opera which can be said to have gained the outskirts of the repertory: Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites.* As a summation, final or not, of Messiaen's *oeuvre* it will command attention, if not complete performances.

The production at the Opéra sought to reproduce the naïve faith of the music through stage pictures recalling paintings of Cimabue, Fra Angelico and Giotto, arranged at times in three-dimensional landscape and at times in separate boxes, deliberately evoking the panels of saintly scenes I saw the next day at the Louvre. The angel glowed in the multicolored wings of Fra Angelico; the chorus, robed as Franciscans, were arranged on steep risers. The staging was minimal, slow-moving and often pantomimed. The conception (sets by Giuseppe Crisolini-Malatesta, direction by Sandro Sequi) worked moderately well, but was beginning to look tacky and obvious by the end.

The glory of the evening's performance (apart from van Dam's warmly lyric voice, and Christiane Eda-Pierre's purely sung angel) lay in the conducting of Seiji Ozawa, which was quite the best work I have ever heard from him. His orchestra was immense: strings in the pit; three *ondes Martenot,* one in boxes to the left, one to the right, one in the pit; woodwinds on a stage built partly over the pit and extending to the left; trumpets in boxes; and the panoply of thwacked keyboards (marimbas etc.) on a corresponding stage to the right, backed by the rest of the brass. The work done in the many rehearsals resulted in a clarity and a forcefulness of expression, and in a timbral clarity that is central to the effectiveness of the score. For once, the standard complaint that a new work was sabotaged by slipshod execution had no validity, and Ozawa no less than the composer must take credit for elucidating what may well be this decade's sacred monster of an artistic achievement.

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Books

The bells of Calanda

by Vernon Young

Luis Buñuel died in 1983, the same age as the century, soon after relating this engrossing autobiography.[1] At the age of twelve, in 1912, growing up in the "medieval" atmosphere of Calanda, in southern Aragon, he still believed that the Virgin of Pilar was superior to the Virgin of Guadalupe—and that babies came from Paris.

Calanda, where "the Middle Ages lasted until World War I," was then a village of fewer than five thousand inhabitants, subsisting on the sale of olive oil, rooted in tradition, in rigorous class distinctions, and, for those who were educated, in the prohibitive disciplines of the Jesuit order. Buñuel spent seven years as a day student at the Colegio del Salvador in Saragossa, where every day began with 7:30 Mass and ended with evening prayers. Privacy and fraternization alike were frowned upon: when a pupil went from the study hall to the bathroom at the end of a long corridor, he was spied on in turn by a proctor and two priests. When together, the boys walked in double file with their arms crossed on their chests ("which kept us from passing notes") and at least a yard apart. "These were the rules—constant surveillance, no 'dangerous' contact, total silence—in study hall, in the chapel, in the dining room." (It goes without saying that the sexes were segregated with comparable zeal.) Religion permeated every phase of life. There were two churches and seven priests in Calanda, and the young Buñuel used to play at celebrating Mass, with his sisters as his attendants. Religion, sexual chastity, and death: when there was a funeral for one of the peasants, the coffin stood in front of the church door. "The priests chanted while a vicar circled the flimsy catafalque . . . and scattered ashes on the chest of the corpse."

"Ironically," Buñuel explains, these implacable restrictions and terminations "inspired a feeling of sin which for me was positively voluptuous. And although I'm not sure why, I have always felt a secret but constant link between the sexual act and death. I've tried to translate this inexplicable feeling into images, as in *Un Chien andalou* when the man caresses the woman's bare breasts as his face slowly changes into a death mask . . . ." If it seems inevitable, after Buñuel has made the connection for us, that his films, early and late, are obsessively concerned with sexual repression and unquestioning faith, we cannot adequately account for them without also paying heed to his abiding nostalgia for the tradition that fostered the very denials he condemns:

1 *My Last Sigh: the Autobiography of Luis Buñuel,* by Luis Buñuel (translated by Abigail Israel). Knopf, 256 pages, $15.95. The original, *Mon dernier soupir* (1982), was structured by Jean-Claude Carrière, scenarist, from a series of conversations with Buñuel. According to Michael Wood, "the English text reads remarkably well though it is marred by innumerable elisions, additions and errors." (See "Farewell Buñuel" in *The New York Review of Books,* November 10, 1983.)

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> Life unfolded in a linear fashion, the major moments marked by the daily bells of the Church at Pilar. They tolled for Masses, vespers and the Angelus, as well as for certain critical, and more secular, events—the tocsin that signaled fire, and the glorious chimes which rang only for major Sunday festivals. There was also a special *toque de agonía*, a deep, somber bell that tolled slowly when someone had begun his final combat . . . . In the fields, on the roads, in the streets of the town, everyone stopped whatever he was doing to ask who was about to die.

In the present, Calanda is without poverty, without code or costume, without night watchmen punctuating one's sleep by crying out *Alabado sea Dios* ("God be praised") or *Las once, sereno* ("Eleven o'clock, fair weather"). Instead there are cars, refrigerators, television—all the elements of a meticulous materialism that has pulverized individual identity and "exiled morality and spirit to a far distant territory." In the past, an ancient order and an ancient rhythm infused the passing of time with bells, incense, and poetry—and "a completely fossilized mode of thought." Unable to reject, in his mind, one polarity for the other, and equally unable to reconcile them, Buñuel resorted, in his art, to the methods of impartial ridicule.

Viridiana (made in Spain, 1961), distinguished above all his other films by its authoritative style and by the savage coherence of its analogies, is a test case for his mordant perspective. The landowner, failing to seduce the novitiate Viridiana (to the music of Mozart's *Requiem*), divides his property between her and his "liberal" nephew Jorge. Much to the liberal's amusement, Viridiana sets up a hostelry for the underprivileged. Her reward is to be cheated by them and, at the climax, all but raped following an orgy of vandalism staged by a vindictive blind man. (For this, Buñuel apes Leonardo's *Last Supper* and enlists Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus.") After order has been restored, Viridiana awaits the pleasure of Jorge, knocking on his parlor door respectfully before entering, to the accompaniment of "Shake Your Blues Away." Contemporary history has rarely found a nutshell better shaped to contain it.

Film-society "radicals" have understandably assumed that because Buñuel's Surrealist efforts fifty years ago were composed of episodes frequently scatological, and unrelated to one another, they and their successors were motivated by a sweeping contempt for established society expressed by an emancipated outlaw. Buñuel has occasionally tried to play up to that role, but in the long run he has significantly contradicted the dissimulation. *My Last Sigh* should revise, for all of us, conclusions about Buñuel that observation alone has left undisturbed. At the outset, we might note that, abruptly exposed to the modern world of Paris in 1925, Buñuel describes it as *chaotic*. Yet he leaves no doubt that in 1925 he found chaos enjoyable.

Paris in the Twenties, for all its dementia, was the greatest place and the most exciting cultural moment our century has known. To the wide-eyed Buñuel, it was a world in which he first learned of couples who lived together out of wedlock without being struck by lightning; a world where he "learned a new relationship between language and life" from an articulate hostess at a Chinese cabaret who came to his table uninvited and gave him a selective resumé of daily Parisian existence. Selective it must have been, since the daily life of Paris in those years had not yet found its Balzac. It was a city of manifest tolerations, together with extremities of political resentment, sudden and savage. Right-wing groups like the Camelots du Roi and Jeunesses Patriotiques organized anti-Semitic raids on Montparnasse. Left-wing demonstrators ruled the streets, looting and smashing, when Sacco and Vanzetti were executed in Boston. It was the Paris of Diaghilev's finest hour, of Stravinsky, and of the last volumes of Marcel Proust, of Gertrude Stein and a precocious Jean Cocteau (earning his lunch money by writing lyrics for a silk-stocking industry), of Sergei Eisenstein passing through—and of forty-five thousand painters, besides Picasso.

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It was a time and place consummately suited to that eye for incongruities touched with the macabre that was the special possession of the Surrealists, among whom, for a decisive term, Buñuel was an illustrious talent. Eisenstein was not favorably impressed. At a Congress of Independent Cinematographers, he somewhat smugly noted that on the same program as his own work, *The Old and the New,* which celebrated "the rising Socialist state system of one sixth of the world," *Un Chien andalou* was included, "a film absolutely and definitively revealing the extent of the disintegration of bourgeois consciousness in Surrealism."[2] Probably unaware of the condescension—he and the Russian did not meet in Paris—Buñuel, on his side, was an enthusiastic admirer of *Potemkin,* not for its ideological argument but for its great cinematic imagination and beauty. Hence, he was fairly disenchanted upon learning that the eminent filmmaker was in Paris and that on the neighboring set (next to that of *L'Age d'or,* Buñuel's second film) he was producing a potboiling musical, *Romance Sentimentale.* (The comic sequel: some years later when the two met in Hollywood, Eisenstein disclaimed responsibility for the musical, explaining that it was directed by his assistant, Alexandrov. Buñuel flatly declares this "an outrageous lie—I watched him shoot that scene with the swans at Billancourt!")

"The disintegration of bourgeois consciousness." The criticism that has followed Eisenstein's mirthless definition, and much criticism has, is further from Buñuel's Surrealism than his own tribute to the cabaret hostess from whom he "learned a new relationship between language and life." Buñuel did not take up moviemaking *in order to* film the sardonic disjunctures of *Un Chien andalou*; this much he has now made clear. Romanticism of another kind inspired his attention to the medium. He was most strongly influenced in his desire to make a film by seeing Fritz Lang's *Destiny,* especially by "the main episode—the arrival of the man in the black hat (whom I instantly recognized as Death) in a Flemish village—and the scene in the cemetery." His first close-in experience sounds as farcical as it was presumably instructive. In a class otherwise composed of White Russians, he took acting lessons from the prestigious exile Jean Epstein, then imposed himself on the director as his assistant when Epstein was shooting *Mauprat* and *The Fall of the House of Usher* in quick succession. By his own confession, Buñuel was patently insubordinate and Epstein discharged him with the dread warning: "You be careful. I see surrealistic tendencies in you. If you want my advice, stay away from them." Obviously, Buñuel did not heed Epstein's advice but the admonition is worth pausing over. If definitions were broader, I should describe *The Fall of the House of Usher* as a distinctive early example of the poetic "surreal" in which, for example, the camera becomes the wind scouring the floor and plucking at the curtains, and books, in eerie slow motion, tumble from their shelves. But of course the nominal Surrealists, in painting, poetry, and cinema, were not bent on lyricizing reality but on destroying its guidelines by their illogical placement of logical objects.

Buñuel is disarmingly honest about the provisional nature of his cinematic breakthrough, in league with Salvador Dali, with whom, in 1929, he spent a few days when visiting Spain. "I told him about a dream I'd had in which a long, tapering cloud sliced the moon in half, like a razor blade slicing through an eye. Dali immediately told me that he'd seen a hand crawling with ants in a dream he'd had . . . . 'And what if we started right there and made a film?' he wondered aloud."

In less than a week they had a script. "Our only rule [was] no idea or image that might lend itself to a rational explanation . . . ."

2 Quoted from Sergei Eisenstein's autobiography, *Immoral Memories*; the English translation (by Herbert Marshall) was published only last year by Houghton Mifflin. On the subject of Soviet Russian principles, Eisenstein tends to be stodgy; but his Paris chapters, copiously inhabited, wonderfully complement those of Buñuel.

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(One bewildered actor was instructed by Buñuel to stare out of the window as if he were thinking about Wagner!) Financing for the film—which took two weeks to shoot, in Paris—came from Buñuel's mother, as comical a connection as any reported in this memoir. Man Ray was responsible for daring to present *Un Chien andalou* at the Studio des Ursulines and as a consequence establishing Buñuel as a member of the Surrealist vanguard (among others, Max Ernst, André Breton, Tzara, Yves Tanguy, Arp, and Magritte). Prolonged applause greeted the premiere; no violence ensued. Buñuel was written into motion-picture history.

L'Age d'or, which Buñuel wrote himself, having lost *d'accord* with Dali, fared less well; or rather, its affront to sexual mores and religious doctrine was infamous enough to initiate a furor that, in Parisian annals, is still known as "the scandal of *L'Age d'or.*" The theater in which the film had played to packed houses in its first week was attacked by the Camelots du Roi and the Jeunesses Patriotiques, who slashed Surrealist paintings in the foyer and demolished furniture. The film's sponsor, Charles de Noailles, was expelled from the Jockey Club and threatened with excommunication by the Pope. A week later the theater was closed by the police chief. The film was censored for public showing, and so it remained for fifty years. Not until 1980 was it released in New York, not before 1981 was it seen outside a *cinémathèque* in Paris.

Today, all this may seem mindless and in excess of the occasion—on both sides. Buñuel, half a century later, was chiefly amused by Dali's quoted "intentions" in writing a screenplay to which in fact he contributed a single gag: he wanted "to expose the shameful mechanisms of society." For Buñuel, on the contrary, *L'Age d'or* was a film about passion, *l'amour fou,* the "irresistible force that thrusts two people together and about the impossibility of their ever becoming one." Beyond that, not having seen the film since it was first shown, he was unprepared to give an opinion about it in

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retrospect. But he is insistent, in this context, on the value of his association with Surrealism at large. He treasures it as "a three-year sojourn in the exalted—and yes, chaotic—ranks of the movement that changed my life. I treasure that access to the depths of the self which I so yearned for, that call to the irrational, to the impulses that spring from the dark side of the soul."

For this hyperbole, we simply have to take his word. One cannot avoid the misgiving, however, that his preceding chronicle of the commitment seemed considerably more facetious than this nostalgic rehearsal of it as a seduction by the abyss. Nor is he any more convincing when, loyal to his vanishing fraternity members, he endows "most surrealists" with a forensic *raison d'être.* "Their aim was not to establish a glorious place for themselves in the annals . . . but to change the world, to transform life itself. This was our essential purpose, but one good look around is evidence enough of our failure." Coming from Buñuel, such an accession of naïveté has an element of charm.

Nothing in his professional life after the Twenties, either what we know of it from the cinema or from what he remembers to tell us, suggests that Buñuel sustained any serious expectations of changing the world through works of art. The *affaire "L'Age d'or"* presumably canceled any burning impulse he might have had to repeat himself in that vein. Free association, to the youthful Buñuel, was no doubt suitable for depicting a world that made no sense. The Buñuel of *Viridiana* or of *The Exterminating Angel* conceded that the world did make sense—in its own benighted way. What, in the films of his maturity, is sometimes described as Surrealistic because it is nightmarish has usually derived from Buñuel's abundant repertory of dreams. (Once, in Mexico, he told a producer, "Don't worry if the film's too short. I'll throw in a dream!") After Paris, at any rate, his first ventures into commercial filmmaking were more often than not the result of contingency rather than dedication. During the five years before the Civil War in Spain, he worked in Paris dubbing Paramount pictures, then in Madrid, doing the same chore for Warner Brothers. On the verge of the war he made a unique documentary, his only creative achievement in that period. Filmed under Spartan conditions and on a low budget, *Las Hurdes* is an authentic closeup of an isolated community in the wilds of Estremadura. "Those graceless mountains fascinated me, as did the poverty and the intelligence of their inhabitants." The film was refused a license for distribution by the president of the governing council, who asked Buñuel why he didn't show "something nice, like folk dances." Later Buñuel learned that his name was on a republican dossier in the files of the civil guard, describing him as "notoriously debauched" and the author of that "crime against the state," *Las Hurdes*; if encountered, he was to be turned over immediately to the Falange for his "just deserts."

On his second retreat from Hollywood, Buñuel was lured to Mexico City to discuss filming, in Paris, a play by Lorca; but the project did not materialize, leaving Buñuel stranded in Mexico. By one of those accidents we are fond of calling design, he met a producer he had known before the war, Oscar Danzigers; as a consequence he remained in Mexico for thirty-six years and directed twenty films there. With two exceptions they were made in Spanish with Mexican actors and technicians. Excepting that of *Robinson Crusoe,* his shooting schedules never ran longer than twenty-four days. The inference that their general lack of distinction is thus accounted for is incredibly compromised by the single masterpiece among them, *Los Olvidados (The Young and the Damned),* which was completed in *twenty-one* days. Bizarre and piercingly cruel, Buñuel's version of life among abandoned slum children is the only film he ever made that might lead one to believe that he was an angry man with a cold passion for social accusation. But in point of fact, the subject was suggested by Danzigers, who, at one juncture, rescued the hellish integrity of the film from Buñuel's proposal to insert a

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wholly frivolous sequence at a thoroughly grim moment. To be sure, Buñuel wrote the screenplay with acerbic conviction and with an eye to observed reality, but the self-sufficient terror he created excludes our reading of it as sociology. (Its protagonists are not the exploited poor but predatory outcasts.) André Malraux once observed that "a torture scene by Goya no longer belongs to torture scenes; it belongs to paintings."

The films by which Buñuel is best known, however, beginning with *Viridiana* in 1961, can fairly be described as comedies. They judge man sardonically, by his intelligence, while making it clear that he is doomed because he so seldom employs it, least of all when his self-preservation is in hazard. Applauders of Buñuel in the Sixties mistakenly associated him with such directors as Francesco Rosi, Joseph Losey, and Jean-Luc Godard. There is nothing like the unsmiling leftism of these men in Buñuel's oblique and gleeful warning to the bourgeoisie that it is strolling across a mine field.

To work at seeing genius in every assignment Buñuel has had a hand in is quite unnecessary. Few of his films are preeminent; nearly all are a pleasure to revisit for the time being. There *is* a Buñuel touch, an arch inflection, a recognizable mischief in all his movies; but they are too fickle in execution to persuade us that we are in the presence of a master. The last film he made, at the age of seventy-seven, *That Obscure Object of Desire,* beautifully illustrates the temper of the man and his superb presence of mind. Halfway through the shooting, his leading actress quit. With his final Surrealist shrug, he replaced her by another and carried on with the same narrative. From critics not in the know, the metamorphosis produced ingenious explanations (mine among them!).

Though he seems unwilling in this last testament to subdue his praise of "the symbolic value of terrorism," his films give short shrift to the value. Fundamentally, they reveal a man of goodwill whose impatience with universal double-think and systematic delusion never sounds a fanatical note. Nobody half-awake, seeing *That Obscure Object of Desire,* could suppose that Buñuel was covertly advocating terrorism!

That Buñuel as a political revolutionary was a reluctant dragon he frankly confirms when he reviews his participation in the Spanish Civil War. "As usual I was torn between my intellectual (and emotional) attraction to anarchy and my fundamental need for order and peace." When the war began, on July 18, 1936, with a clash between Falange and Republican troops, he was in Madrid, on the spot. Ardently on the side of the Republic, he was impenitently aware of the contradictions he was compelled to face.

> The first three months were the worst, mostly because of the total absence of control. I, who had been such an ardent subversive, who had so desired the overthrow of the established order, now found myself in the middle of a volcano, and I was afraid. If certain exploits seemed to me both absurd and glorious—like the workers who climbed into a truck and drove out to the monument to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, . . . formed a firing squad and executed the statue of Christ—I nonetheless couldn't stomach the summary executions, the looting, the criminal acts. No sooner had the people risen and seized power than they split into factions and began tearing one another to pieces. This insane and indiscriminate settling of accounts made everyone forget the essential reasons for the war.

Although Buñuel protests that he is not qualified to be an historian of the Spanish tragedy, his principal judgments are, I believe, in agreement with those given by accepted authorities. He reiterates the disrupting role played by the Anarchists, who seemed more bitterly opposed to the Communists than to the fascist enemy. Their looting of wine cellars, among other footloose actions, drove many Republicans into the arms of the Communists. To Buñuel, then and when he wrote these words, the Communists, "organized and disciplined, focused on the war itself," seemed "irreproachable." (One won-

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ders whether his opinion would have remained as generous had the Communists triumphed and set up a single-party regime more efficient than that of Franco.)

Sent by the Republican Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Embassy in Paris, there to oversee news and propaganda (and incidentally to organize Embassy dinners, "which meant not seating André Gide next to Louis Aragon"), Buñuel spent the war as an anxious commuter between a country which was safe, sympathetic, but ultimately uncooperative and the battleground of Spain on which his Republic was ingloriously overpowered by enemies within and without.

As one might have expected, from the foregoing clues to Buñuel's personality, he is most irresistibly himself, and most Spanish, when, separated from Spain by an ocean, he awaits, in Mexico City, the real undistinguished thing. "From the time that skeletons were carried through the streets of Calanda during the Holy Week procession, death has been an integral part of my life. I've never wished to forget or deny it; but there's not much to say about it when you're an atheist." For many years, in a notebook he called his "Book of the Dead," he marked with red crosses the old friends who had died. 1977-78 was "the fatal year" for Surrealists, when Man Ray, Calder, Max Ernst and Jacques Prévert all died within a few months of one another. For himself, there is no abdication from his sustained aversion to explanations, either of the here or the hereafter, and no relenting confidence in a livable future for man on earth. "The last screenplay I worked on, for a film I'll never make, deals with a triple threat: science, terrorism, and the free press." (It should be noted that neither the Church nor the discreetly charming bourgeoisie appears in this configuration!)

Shut in with the bull, he expresses a last hope that a slow death will be preferable to a quick unexpected one, so that he can revisit the places where he has lived and worked—Paris, Madrid, Toledo, El Paular, San Jose Purua. Perhaps his most attractive trait is his retention of the sentiment, no less than of the wit that steadies it, for the spirit of place on this earth.

> I say goodbye to everything—to the mountains, the streams, the trees, even the frogs. And of course irony would have it that I often return to a place I've already bid goodbye but it doesn't matter. When I leave, I just say goodbye once again.

Life ends as it began, with a ceremonial courtesy. If we listen closely we shall hear at the last the bells of Pilar in Calanda, tolling for Masses and Vespers, fires and festivals.

> There was also a special *toque de agonía,* a deep, somber bell that tolled slowly when someone had begun his final combat . . . . In the fields, on the roads, in the streets of the town, everyone stopped whatever he was doing to ask who was about to die.

Balanchine musagète

Robert Tracy, with Sharon DeLano
Balanchine's Ballerinas: Conversations with the Muses. Simon & Schuster, 192 pages, $24.95

reviewed by Eva Resnikova

With the death of George Balanchine last April, the stage was cleared for the biographers waiting in the wings. Among the projects that have been announced are a second updating of Bernard Taper's biography—based on a 1960 *New Yorker* profile—and a new biography by Richard Buckle (chronicler of the lives of Nijinsky and Diaghilev) in collaboration with Balanchine's longtime associate and ballet master John Taras. But it is the dancers themselves who are likely to provide the most valuable insights into Balanchine the choreographer. In no other art is the performer so much a part of the creative process as in dance: he is the choreographer's raw material, the "paint in the pot," as Toni Bentley wrote in her journal *Winter Season.*

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Rare is the dancer who is able to communicate with words as eloquently as he communicates with gestures, and so dancers have traditionally employed "as-told-to" or "with" writers to help them verbalize their thoughts. If the dancer is intelligent, and the writer is sensitive and knowledgeable, the result can be as valuable as Peter Martins's recent autobiography, *Far from Denmark,* prepared in collaboration with Robert Cornfield. But when the "as-told-to" himself requires a "with," then something is amiss. Such is the case with *Balanchine's Ballerinas: Conversations with the Muses,* a collection of interviews with nineteen former and present ballerinas who have worked closely with George Balanchine.

The subtitle of this volume is apt: woman inspires, man creates, Balanchine believed. Though artistically a classicist with a no-nonsense attitude toward his work ("My muse must come to me on union time," he was fond of saying), Balanchine had a highly romanticized, idealized view of women, which managed to survive four marriages and as many divorces, innumerable romances, desertion, illness, and old age. If anything, Balanchine's romanticism deepened as he grew older: a ballet like *Davidsbündlertänze* would have been unimaginable twenty—or even ten—years earlier.

Balanchine's Ballerinas barely touches on Balanchine's view of women and the way in which they affected his choreography. The very concept implied in the book's title—that there is such a thing as a "Balanchine ballerina"—is scarcely addressed. We are told in an introduction that "Balanchine's collaboration with his ballerinas . . . gave rise to the figure known as the 'Balanchine dancer,' the model for the contemporary ballerina," but we never learn exactly what this figure is. Certainly this question might profitably have led off every interview; in fact, it is never posed. As the author himself points out, the ballerinas rather "testify to their individuality and describe how Balanchine integrated their idiosyncracies [*sic*] into his ballets."

The questions that do get asked are rarely stimulating. A typical interview begins with Mr. Tracy telling the ballerina something that she already knows (to Maria Tallchief: "You began taking ballet classes when you were very young—only four, as I remember reading somewhere . . . ."). The reader knows it, too, having just read the biographical essay that precedes each interview. This is then followed by a question on the order of "How did that come about?" or "What was that like?" Often the questions are merely rhetorical devices (to Marie-Jeanne: "You were living in Argentina when Balanchine came there to set a piece at the Teatro Colón, weren't you?").

Despite Mr. Tracy's interviewing technique, there are some wonderful moments. Here are Ruthanna Boris's recollections of her audition for the School of American Ballet on its opening day in 1934:

> In a room at the school on Fifty-ninth and Madison there were two men. One looked Chinese. That was Balanchine. He was young and handsome. Gorgeous . . . . Then he said, "Do a double pirouette." . . . I told him I could only do single turns. "No," he said, "you will do it. You will see." So I tried and he spanked me and I went around twice and fell down . . . . He looked down at me and said, "You remind me of little girls when I was a little boy. So old-fashioned . . . . You are like from the past. So chubby. I would like to bite your knees. To take a bite out of your knees." He was so adorable.

And Violette Verdy's philosophical attitude toward having to relinquish certain roles to the redoubtable and iron-willed Melissa Hayden:

> Balanchine knew what he was doing and he knew what I was thinking. He would tap me on my cheek and say, "That's a nice Christian girl for you." Because he knew I wasn't going to say anything, that Melissa in any case would squash me if she needed more . . . . Don't forget that Balanchine . . . is also a director running a company, and he knows his animals. He has to deal with a zoo. When you have a peli-

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can and you have a hippo, . . . the bigger animal is going to eat the little one next door when you open the gate. And sometimes it's necessary to let that happen. The big animal has what he needs, and the little animal . . . well, never mind, you'll find another one next year.

The interview with former "baby ballerina" Tamara Toumanova, the "Black Pearl of Russian Ballet," now in her sixties, transports us back to a time when a ballerina was expected to act the part and a well-bred young dancer traveled with a mother in tow who acted as a combination duenna and flack. Happily, the elder Madame Toumanova is still looking out for her daughter's reputation—providing documentary evidence:

TAMARA: I was invited [to join the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo] because my name was very well known in Paris already with *L'Éventail de Jeanne.*
MAMA: She received the headline in fourteen newspapers.

completing sentences:

TAMARA: Technique is the greatest mastery when you do it . . .
MAMA: Like nothing.

or simply summing up the situation:

TAMARA: *Cotillon* was about a girl's first coming-out ball. It was a symbolic thing for me.
MAMA: Balanchine is a genius.

Toumanova herself is something of a deadpan wit and could probably have a second career as a talk-show guest. Witness her comments on rival baby ballerina Tatiana Riabouchinska:

And then you met Tatiana Riabouchinska in Monte Carlo?
Tania arrived from America . . . with a fur coat, and I said to Mama, "My God, how rich can you be?"

Were you friends?
I was friends with those who wanted to be friends.

But you were presented as a sort of team. The Baby Ballerinas.
This Baby Ballerina thing became like a toothache.

There are a few scattered revelations about the choreography. From Patricia McBride we learn why she and Edward Villella exit at one point during *Rubies* ("When we ran through the whole piece for the first time it was so hard that Balanchine cut out some of the movements and let us run offstage for a breather."), and from Karin von Aroldingen we discover the origin of her circle of twists on all fours in *Stravinsky Violin Concerto* ("Balanchine . . . asked me if I could do a bridge, and I did one, and then he said, 'Where do you fall from there?' So I twisted myself out of this very strange bridge . . . . He liked it and put it in.").

But such moments are rare, and the book actually contains little that is new. Contrary to the claim made in the jacket copy, this is not the "first time" that these dancers "speak of their careers." Such interviews are a staple of dance journalism, and collections in book form appear regularly. John Gruen's *The Private World of Ballet,* for example, contains interviews with eight of the dancers included in *Balanchine's Ballerinas,* and four who are not. The quarterly *Ballet Review* has made it a practice to publish lengthy conversations with dancers. Especially noteworthy are David Daniel's interviews with Suzanne Farrell, and with Diana Adams on Farrell. *Ballet Review* has also recently reprinted from Barbara Newman's *Striking a Balance: Dancers Talk about Dancing* her long interview with Tanaquil LeClercq.

Which brings us to a major flaw in *Balanchine's Ballerinas.* Whatever LeClercq's reasons for not wishing to be interviewed for the book (one assumes she was asked), the author would have done better to have dealt openly with the problem rather than pre-

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tending that she was a less significant figure in Balanchine's life and work than she actually was. Only the barest outline of the facts is given concerning her marriage to Balanchine in 1952, her bout with polio four years later, and Balanchine's subsequent year-long absence from the company—though the tragedy affected him profoundly, apparently influencing his turn to religion. Nothing at all is said of LeClercq's distinctive looks and manner, though she was the first of Balanchine's ballerinas to be trained in his school from childhood and was the prototype of what we recognize today as the "Balanchine ballerina." Her influence on his career is evident from the number of ballets in which he created major roles for her during her short career, among them, *The Four Temperaments, Symphonie Concertante, Orpheus, Bourrée Fantasque, La Valse, Caracole* (and the later *Divertimento No. 15*), *The Nutcracker, Western Symphony,* and *Ivesiana.*

The book is overburdened with historical and biographical background material, not all of it entirely accurate. Balanchine entered the Imperial Theatre School in St. Petersburg not in 1914 but in 1913, as the chronology at the back of the book correctly states. Similarly, he joined Diaghilev's company not in 1925 but in 1924; again, the chronology gives the correct year. These are trivial. More serious is the author's unqualified assertion that "when Lucia Chase formed Ballet Theatre in 1939 Balanchine was practically the only choreographer in America not asked to contribute work." This is the version advanced by Taper; but Charles Payne makes a serious case in *American Ballet Theatre* that it was Balanchine who was not interested. Since there is no hard evidence to support either side, the author ought at least to have acknowledged that this remains a controversial issue.

Mr. Tracy seldom ventures any views of his own on the ballets, but when he does he comes up with some startling conclusions. The two couples who dance the murderous solo roles in *Kammermusik No. 2* would be astonished to learn that in this ballet "the burden of the dancing falls on . . . a corps of eight boys." We also read, apropos of *Western Symphony,* that "what made it pure Balanchine and not just another cowboy ballet was that the steps were strictly classical. The 'Westerness' [*sic*] came from the speed and accent and visual emphasis of the choreography." Whatever "visual emphasis" may mean, the speed and accenting are what make the classical steps in *Western Symphony* pure Balanchine. The "Westernness" comes from the music, costumes, and miming. To misconstrue this basic concept is to betray a profound ignorance of the aesthetics of the classical ballet.

One of the book's oddest quirks occurs in the listings at the end of each interview under the heading "Ballets in Which Balanchine Created Roles for . . ." followed by the ballerina's name, giving production information for the ballets. In the Balanchine *Catalogue* published last year by Eakins Press, from which these listings were presumably compiled, a separate entry is given for a ballet each time a production is mounted for another Balanchine company. These multiple listings have apparently been carried over unthinkingly to *Balanchine's Ballerinas,* resulting in, for example, Balanchine "creating" the role of Terpsichore in *Apollo* four times in the course of the book: for Danilova in 1928, for Elise Reiman in 1937, for Marie-Jeanne in 1941, and for Maria Tallchief in 1951. Of course, Balanchine did no such thing, the only significant difference between the productions being the décor and the costumes.

The book is profusely illustrated with rehearsal and performance shots, posed studies, snapshots, and portraits, many of them unfamiliar. Among the standouts is an action shot of Suzanne Farrell in *Diamonds* poised in an arabesque so stunning in its perfection that it appears as the essential arabesque from which all others derive their imperfect existences. Elsewhere we see Balanchine posing for publicity shots with his corps girls, clowning in the pool at Monte Carlo with the thirteen-year-old Toumanova, playing tourist with Suzanne Farrell, and

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grinning conspiratorially with Kay Mazzo on his knee during a rehearsal of the ill-fated *PAMTGG*.

Unfortunately, the book is overdesigned and the pictures insensitively handled. Toes and fingers have been cropped without mercy; crudely silhouetted figures float in the ether, occasionally sticking a limb into the type column. Perhaps the worst "cute" idea in the book is the silhouetted figure of Maria Tallchief in the *Minkus Pas de Trois* balancing on one pointe atop a scene from *Apollo*. As for the "formal portraits" taken especially for this book—for which the victims were hot-curlered and subjected to the ministrations of a makeup "artist" (the author's term)—they are studies in tastelessness that tell us nothing about either Balanchine or dancing. That the women (with the exception of Diana Adams) allowed themselves to be exploited in this fashion is no excuse.

The real motivation for including these contemporary portraits appears, in fact, to have been commercial rather than artistic: the photographer is offering, through a New York gallery, a limited-edition portfolio of selected ballerinas for two thousand dollars. The exhibition also includes several ballerinas who are not in the book, which raises the question of how the final selection was made, since those dancers who allowed themselves to be photographed presumably did not decline to be interviewed. Why are—to name only the most important—Patricia Wilde, Janet Reed, Gisella Caccialanza, Yvonne Mounsey, and Jillana missing from the book? Surely anything they might have to say about Balanchine would be more useful and pertinent than these School of Avedon exercises, to which twenty-five pages have been devoted. And why was eighteen-year-old Darci Kistler, for whom Balanchine created no roles and who has very little to say, included? Her appearance in the book seems to have been motivated primarily by the desire to end it sentimentally with a full-page blow-up of an out-of-focus snapshot showing the nearly eighty-year-old Danilova, who opened the book, with her arm around the teenager.

The most touching—and telling—picture in the book is Martha Swope's jacket photograph (offered with no identification) showing Balanchine rehearsing a young Suzanne Farrell in the 1966 Stravinsky *Variations*. He is dapper in street clothes (complete with argyle socks), she demure in a high-necked leotard with a small ruffle around the hips. They are both poised in midair. On the left, he demonstrates—one leg half-bent, its foot dangling, arms raised and fingers snapping to mark the beat. On the right, his ballerina has instinctively produced from these vague indications one of those nameless, inverted, awkward-graceful positions that is at once peculiarly Balanchinean and peculiarly Farrellian. Between the two, in that mystical translation wherein something is gained rather than lost, lies the process of choreography.

A passionate critic

Kenneth S. Lynn The Air-Line to Seattle. University of Chicago Press, 238 pages, $17.50

reviewed by Tom Nieman

"The first thing that we ask of a writer," George Orwell once wrote, "is that he shall not tell lies, that he shall say what he really thinks, what he really feels." Part of the reason Orwell so esteemed truthfulness was that he cared passionately about the historical record handed on to future generations. Kenneth S. Lynn, who in *The Air-Line to Seattle* certainly shows no hesitation about saying what he really believes, shares Orwell's concern for the historical record. The essays and reviews in this collection, half of which first appeared in *Commentary* magazine, make noteworthy amendments to that record, and their cumulative effect is to force a reader to reassess much of what has been written about American literature and history.

Lynn intends to jar intellectuals from complacency and expose the extent to which

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ideological bias and slovenly scholarship have replaced genuine criticism. He begins more or less where Oscar Handlin left off in *Truth in History* (1979). There Handlin wrote: "The flaccid acceptance of shoddy work had long been a scandal of scholarly and literary journals, which encouraged reviewers to focus on interpretations rather than on craftsmanship. To expose an error of fact was regarded as irrelevant nit-picking, a reflection upon the critic who grubbed about in footnotes rather than soaring with the ideas." Handlin regretted that "the correctness or incorrectness of statements and the proper or improper use of evidence were trivial issues." When correctness no longer mattered, all interpretations became equal. Only points of view differed—a position that reduced all matters to gentlemanly differences of opinion and ruled out the possibility of anything as unseemly as distortion or falsification. For Handlin, "The important question is: what is done when [a] fault is discovered?" His answer: "In the end, the integrity of the discipline demands exposure."

Kenneth Lynn is inspired by similar sentiments. In the opening essay of *The Air-Line to Seattle,* he launches a swarming attack on Garry Wills's highly praised attempt to reinterpret the Declaration of Independence in *Inventing America.* Wills's admirers apparently did not care, or perhaps realize, that he committed factual errors, misquoted, distorted evidence, and made a number of convenient assumptions. Lynn, who does care about such things, points out these faults while also citing Wills's book for its "shameless pandering to leftist prejudices." In "The Regressive Historians," Lynn brings the scholarship of Bernard Bailyn, Leo Marx, and Eugene Genovese to a day of judgment. The general flavor of that essay can be fairly gauged from this remark about one of Genovese's books: "Circular arguments, slippery-slick non sequiturs, collapsing time frames, irrelevant quotations, and gloriously unfootnoted generalizations also contribute to the excitement of reading *Roll, Jordan, Roll.*"

For Lynn, the true business of literary and historical criticism is not only enforcing standards but also revising faulty opinion. High on the list of interpretations Lynn wishes to correct is "the legend of the lost generation that [Malcolm] Cowley wove from the warp of the Communist line and the woof of his own romanticism." Lynn also attempts to revise the belief, now widely taught in high schools and colleges, that *Huckleberry Finn* represents in the end a condemnation of American life. Besides disapproving of the anti-Americanism so prevalent in criticism since the mid-1960s, Lynn disapproves of the efforts to appease blacks, feminists, and homosexuals that have crept into literary and historical interpretations in recent years. It becomes almost an article of belief with him that criticism is loaded with ideological bias and will reveal nearly as much about the critic as about the subject.

Before Lynn returned to intellectual journalism and to combat with the ideologues of our day, he published *William Dean Howells: An American Life* (1970). In that biography he set himself the task of revising the image of "Howells's celebrated prudishness as a novelist and literary editor, which has done such terrible damage to his posthumous reputation . . . ." Lynn traces the prudishness to psychological troubles in Howells's Ohio childhood and presents him as diplomatic—not, as reputation has it, in a state of servile surrender—before the moralists who dominated Boston society, and notably its established lions, Holmes, Emerson, Hawthorne, and Longfellow. Estimates of Lynn's biography—which in my view is a sound piece of work—will pretty much depend on how persuasive one finds his revisions to Howells's reputation. Virtually the same criteria can be applied to *The Air-Line to Seattle.* What is the quality of the revisions Lynn proposes and how persuasive are they?

In my view Lynn's revisions are worth making, and they are argued for with impressive thoroughness. Consider, for example, Lynn's correction of what he calls "the war-victim interpretation of Hemingway." He says the view originated in 1939 with

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Edmund Wilson's essay, "Hemingway: Gauge of Morale," published eventually as a part of *The Wound and the Bow*. Later, Malcolm Cowley stretched the interpretation further, particularly in connection with the story "Big Two-Hearted River," in an introduction to the Viking *Portable Hemingway*. As the war-victim interpretation gathered a following, later commentators such as Philip Young and Mark Schorer added further embellishments, so that now it runs roughly as follows: because of the brutality he witnessed during World War I, Hemingway suffered a psychological wound much more grave than his physical wounds; this led him to create literary heroes such as Jake Barnes and Nick Adams, who were intensely attuned to the terrors of the modern world; the result, as Wilson put it, was that Hemingway's "whole work is a criticism of society." To substantiate such a reading, some strenuous overinterpretation is required. Commentators have relied on resonances or imagination more than on references in the work. Lynn believes the interpretation derives chiefly from Wilson and Cowley's underlying Marxist and generally anti-capitalist bias.

Considerably more material is available today than at the time Wilson and Cowley wrote. Even so, the accumulation of critical weight on the by now standard interpretation has been too much for later critics—among them Hemingway's biographer Carlos Baker—to resist. In "Hemingway's Private War" Lynn brings the interpretation of Hemingway back from the nether regions of resonance to solider evidence—namely, to biographical facts, to letters, to references in the works themselves. He uses the material to build a case that Hemingway's relationship with his mother and with his first wife, Hadley Richardson, were the most important influences on his fiction.

Lynn's arguments for this view are quite convincing, although they depend to a certain extent on psychological inference. Lynn has always psychologized in his criticism. Quite often his interpretations hover over the same ground, the early relationship with parents. Lynn's psychology is by and large Freudian, minus—in most instances—the irksome jargon. In *The Air-Line to Seattle* he generally uses psychology with skill, as in his essay on Hemingway. Lynn has included psychological portraits of this kind in earlier books—for example, his portrait of Edmund Wilson in *Visions of America* (1973)—but rarely have they been of this same order of subtlety and persuasiveness.

Lynn's portrait of Emerson in *The Air-Line to Seattle* also merits notice. The question addressed in "Emerson the Man" is: did Emerson, who in his writings called upon young men to turn away from material values in favor of purer spiritual ones, marry the tubercular Boston heiress Ellen Tucker for her money? Mere fact—marriage to a dying heiress—would seem enough to spatter the image of Emerson as the high-minded idealist, yet his biographers have hedged the question because the letters during the time of his courtship no longer exist. Lynn circumvented this difficulty by using Ellen Tucker's letters about the "ugly subject" of her will, as well as other biographical sources, and he concludes that Emerson "was in no less hot pursuit of vulgar prosperity than the most barbaric businessman of the age."

Equally persuasive, if less elegant, is a long essay entitled "The Rebels of Greenwich Village." In that essay Lynn examines the generalizations used to describe the young men and women who flocked to Greenwich Village around 1912. They are commonly characterized—by Henry F. May and Christopher Lasch, among others—as wonderfully young, in full flight from small towns and villages in the Middle West, and resentful, both of middle-class culture and traditional values. But is the characterization accurate? Lynn believes it is not, and he has the statistics to prove it. He categorized the family backgrounds of roughly a hundred of the "rebels," a procedure that no doubt relied as much on judgment as on quantifiable evidence. Nonetheless, the results are illuminating. The average age was thirty; roughly half came from foreign countries or the East and, more often than not, from

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urban environments; and a substantial number grew up quite happily in upper-middle-class families. Interesting as these facts are, they do not explain what attracted these people to the Village. Lynn believes that it was the fact that Greenwich Village *was* a village. To many people, America then seemed a land of diminished possibilities, and the Village was a refuge. Lynn quotes Floyd Dell as saying that the Village was a "place where people came to solve some of their life problems . . . . A moral health resort—that was what it was."

Lynn's essay presents the rebels of Greenwich Village as a diverse, complicated lot. Why is it that, when other writers have tackled this subject—or the many other subjects in Lynn's book—they have produced such shaky interpretations, if not outright distortions? Lynn believes the answer lies in the genteel tradition of American thought. In the prologue to *The Air-Line to Seattle,* he discusses that tradition in detail, beginning with George Santayana's original formulation of it, and explains what, exactly, is wrong. Intellectuals, forever prone to old habits and old delusions, are hopelessly cut off, in Santayana's phrase, from "the variety, the unspeakable variety of possible life," of which the air-line to Seattle (actually, at the time, a railroad) was a symbol. Lynn follows the progress of the tradition through the decades and concludes by declaring that, despite the sexual and radical interests of contemporary writers, "the spirit of the genteel tradition is triumphantly alive in American thought."

Throughout these essays and reviews Lynn's tone is anything but genteel. He sounds angry, a little put out and ticked off. When, for example, Malcolm Cowley's recollections of the 1930s in *The Dream of the Golden Mountains* met with high praise from reviewers, Lynn, who believes it to be a dishonest book, simply fulminates: "What in the world could have possessed these reviewers to make such irresponsible statements? The case of R. W. B. Lewis can be quickly dismissed. He simply does not know what he is talking about. The dishonesty of his review of Cowley's book consists of a pretension to an expertise about American intellectual life in the 1930s that he does not possess." Alfred Kazin, another of the reviewers, is a "starry-eyed opportunist" who did not care "to acknowledge certain unflattering truths about his own reviewing in the thirties . . . ."

Lynn wants to expose the guilty. But, does he also want to parade them through the streets? Although it may sometimes seem so, my sense is that he does not. His criticisms carry no malice. They are the work of a man deeply concerned—and not a little exasperated—by what he believes to be insincerity and dishonesty. If he at times writes angrily, it ought to be said that there is usually a real target for his anger in intellectual incompetence, hypocrisy, or fraud. What is more, anger has its uses. Propelled by anger, *The Air-Line to Seattle* is a more eloquent book than such of Lynn's earlier works as *The Dream of Success* (1955) and *Visions of America* (1973). *The Air-Line to Seattle* is a work of intellectual passion, and in the end richer, stronger, more impressive for the passion that lies behind it.

Trial and tribulation

Joseph Frank Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1849-1859. Princeton University Press, 359 pages, $25

reviewed by René Wellek

There is a plethora of biographies of Dostoevsky in English. In 1912, the year Constance Garnett's translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* appeared (more than thirty years after the Russian publication), J. A. T. Lloyd compiled a work based almost entirely on the Russian biography by Nikolay Strakhov and Orest Miller that was authorized by Dostoevsky's widow. In 1916, John Middleton Murry, today known mainly as the husband of Katherine Mansfield, established his reputation with *Dostoevsky,* which is not so much a biography as an account of Dos-

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toevsky's spiritual pilgrimage. In 1931, E. H. Carr, later the historian of the Russian Revolution, wrote a biography that used the new evidence unearthed in Russia during the Twenties. It was a sober, factual account, detached and even condescending. Dostoevsky appears as a weak, even pathetic figure, disingenuous in his human relations, a victim whose greatness as a novelist and thinker remains inexplicable. The introduction to Carr's book by D. S. Mirsky, whose *History of Russian Literature* is still rightly admired for its power of characterization and trenchant judgments, condemns Murry's book as "Pecksniffian sobstuff." Since then, more equitable writers have taken over. Avrahm Yarmolinsky in America, in 1934, and David Magarshack in England, in 1961, provided full narratives; and Henri Troyat's biography, translated from the French (1946), and Leonid Grossman's translated from the Russian (1974), rival the accounts in English. In 1940, Ernest J. Simmons, the founder of professional Slavic studies in this country, wrote a solid monograph entitled *Dostoevsky: The Making of a Novelist.* It is a reliable digest of Russian scholarship focused on Dostoevsky's evolution as an artist and thinker. Since then a veritable flood of books and articles on almost every aspect of Dostoevsky's life and work has followed.

Thus, Joseph Frank set himself a formidable task when he began his own work on Dostoevsky, the first volume of which, called *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849,* appeared in 1976. In the preface to that volume Mr. Frank explains that his work is not a biography, that he will not trace Dostoevsky's quotidian experience. "My purpose is to interpret Dostoevsky's art." Thus, "the background of the events of Dostoevsky's private existence" will be dealt with only as far as it may "help to cast some light on his books." The emphasis will be on "a massive reconstruction of the socio-cultural life of his period." Dostoevsky is seen not as expressing personal torments but as absorbing and using the ideas and feelings of his time. Mr. Frank hopes this will lead to "a far better understanding of the significance of his achievement." The first volume completely fulfilled these promises: it gives an excellent account of the cultural and religious background of Dostoevsky's youth, of his family, of his first literary success with the novel *Poor Folk,* of his relation to the domineering critic Vissarion Belinsky, of his growing participation in oppositional circles, and of his early writings. Mr. Frank's discussion of Freud's essay "Dostoevsky and Parricide" is especially valuable. With good sense and a complete mastery of the evidence Mr. Frank rejects Freud's highly influential speculations.

The second volume of Mr. Frank's project covers Dostoevsky's trial for conspiracy, the mock execution, his four years of penal servitude (1850-54) in fetters in a Siberian stockade, and his years in the Russian army stationed in a desolate Siberian garrison town, Semipalatinsk, near the Chinese border. There he fell in love with a widow, Maria Dimitrevna Isaev, whom he married even before he was finally allowed to return to St. Petersburg. During all these years Dostoevsky wrote (or rather could write) only three stories. A harmless, nostalgic story called "The Little Hero" was written in prison while he awaited sentencing for his part in the Petrashevsky conspiracy. Two other stories, "Uncle's Dream" and "The Village of Stepanchikovo and its Inhabitants" (better known by Mrs. Garnett's title as "The Friend of the Family"), were written in the last years in Siberia. Mr. Frank is thus compelled to give up his focus on the actual writings of Dostoevsky. He does discuss the three stories perceptively, trying to relate them to Dostoevsky's states of mind. In my view, he allegorizes unduly "The Little Hero," the story of a thirteen-year-old boy who chivalrously conceals the relation of an adored mature woman to her lover. Mr. Frank sees this as parallel to Dostoevsky's own situation. "He had, after all, sacrificed himself for the suffering Russian people and was still in the midst of a struggle to keep the secret of the conspiracy from the authorities." In "Uncle's Dream," a slapstick farce, Mr. Frank finds an attack on literary Roman-

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ticism. He asks: "Would not Dostoevsky have tended to see himself as the victim of a similar specious idealism, and had he not learned the human cost of such self-intoxication?" He rightly sees "The Village of Stepanchikovo" as providing two contrasting character types who will recur with variations in the later Dostoevsky. The meek, good Colonel Rostanev and the parasite and buffoon Foma Fomich anticipate the good man Myshkin and the Underground Man. Some details seem strained: the parallel to the Chernyshevsky-Annenkov debate is hardly justified by the quotations adduced, which comment simply on Colonel Rostanev's meekness and sensitivity to the feelings of others.

Although deprived of the opportunity for strictly literary criticism, Mr. Frank keeps his promise to emphasize a "massive reconstruction of the socio-cultural life of the period," which was the greatest strength of the first volume. Here he shows how Dostoevsky's change of mind during these years reflected changes in the opinion of the Russian intelligentsia of the time. The Crimean War was the decisive event. It reawakened both the latent nationalism of the Russian intelligentsia and its resentment toward the West for allying itself with the Turks. Then came the ascension of Alexander II and the emancipation of the serfs, which aroused a wave of enthusiasm for the new Czar. In describing the years in the stockade, Mr. Frank emphasizes the antagonism Dostoevsky felt toward the Polish political prisoners and uses the account that Dostoevsky gave in the *Writer's Diary* in 1873, more than twenty years later, to interpret Dostoevsky's "conversion." Frank refers to William James, to Pavlov, and to a Dr. William Sargant in order to make the conversion experience plausible, and persuasively argues that it must have occurred not at the first Easter in the camp but at the second, in 1851. The two and a half months in the camp before the first Easter would not have sufficed to prepare him for this change of heart. Frank is at his best when he shows that Dostoevsky's conversion should not be seen as that "of a strayed ex-believer returning to Christ," since Dostoevsky had never converted to Belinsky's atheism. As much as anything the conversion was a change in his relation to the Russian people. Mr. Frank argues that there is simply no evidence for the Freudian view that Dostoevsky "submitted to or sought punishment from the Czar-Father." On the basis of Mr. Frank's careful description of the years in the camp, one could doubt whether there was a sudden conversion at all. Possibly the whole process was gradual, the experience with the Poles on that Easter eve merely precipitating the change and standing out in Dostoevsky's memory. To describe Dostoevsky's four years in the prison camp, Mr. Frank draws on the *Memoirs of the House of the Dead* (1864), which is a later, fictionalized account written with an eye on the censor. Frank selects, sometimes rather arbitrarily, what can be assumed to be Dostoevsky's own experiences. He describes Dostoevsky's fellow prisoners by drawing on Dostoevsky's portraits of types. One can trust Mr. Frank's judgment and good sense in the selection but still wonder how he can distinguish between the autobiographical and fictional material in the book. Surely some of the people in the book, and the fates they suffer, might have been adjusted to meet the requirements of the novel. Mr. Frank tells us he will discuss *Memoirs of the House of the Dead* as a novel in his next volume.

The early chapters in *The Years of Ordeal,* telling the story of Dostoevsky's life, are the best in the book. We all know the outcome of the mock execution, but Mr. Frank tells it in such concrete detail that it becomes a breathtaking suspense story. Also, his account of Dostoevsky's behavior during the interrogation—"clever, independent, cunning, stubborn," as General Y. I. Rostovstev, a member of the Commission of Inquiry, admitted later—is superbly told and acutely analyzed.

Mr. Frank has skillfully used all the documents and letters discovered in the last sixty years, particularly on the Petrashevsky con-

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spiracy, and has also judiciously used neglected reminiscences and letters addressed to Dostoevsky (like those of H. N. Pleshcheev) to throw light on many details. Among the corrections of older accounts it may be worth noting that in Dostoevsky's first letter to his brother after his release from the prison camp he does not ask for a copy of the "Coran" (besides Kant and Hegel) to be sent to him but instead for "Carus," which was the name of a German physician whose book *Psyche* Dostoevsky wished to translate. Mr. Frank did not himself discover the error but he read of the correction in a French journal and here points it out. The book is thus both a work of scholarship of great interest to the specialist and a well-told narrative of Dostoevsky's life, a penetrating analysis of his mind in the context of the times, an interpretation of his ideology, and a psychological analysis of his feelings both in prison and during his courtship of Maria Dimitrevna, although this awkward and agonizing relationship does not seem to interest Frank very much. He refuses to draw on the fictionalized parallels in *The Insulted and the Injured,* which are presumably too removed from reality, and he minimizes the melodramatic features of the scenes that indicate a strange masochistic tendency in Dostoevsky's erotic life. The exaltations, the floods of tears, the constant humiliations, the suspicions are glossed over. Here, of course, as almost everywhere during these ten years, Frank is handicapped by a dearth of sources. This will change in the future when he will be confronted with a wealth of evidence and the challenge of voluminous and complex works. In the preface to the first volume Frank envisioned four volumes, but it looks now as if the third volume will only come up to 1865 and that two or three further volumes will be needed to bring the project to an end. One can only look forward to these volumes and wish Mr. Frank the perseverance and energy to bring this great enterprise to conclusion.

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Notebook

Philosophizing at the Boston-Sheraton

by Roger Kimball

On December 27, the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division, returned to the Sheraton-Boston hotel in downtown Boston's Prudential Center for its eightieth annual meeting. One could safely hazard that not since 1980, when the APA last convened in Boston, had the Sheraton's tidy, convention-center hallways been so alive with imponderables. Although professionally committed to the love of wisdom, philosophers are men and women of wildly different temperaments and training, and often they can hardly bear to be in the same room with one another back home. Yet for four days, philosophers of every conceivable stripe crowded together into these business-like surroundings to catch up with colleagues from other institutions, to deliver or listen to papers on matters of current philosophical moment, and, except for the tenured elite, to scout around for jobs.

As has become customary, the meeting included papers and symposia officially sponsored by the APA and a potpourri of discussions sponsored by the many independent philosophical organizations that gather at the APA meeting to propagate their ideas and conduct business. The program of officially sponsored sessions—sometimes technical ("Epistemic Supervenience and the Circle of Belief"), sometimes not ("The Social Responsibility of Intellectuals")—was calculated to be of interest to the professional philosophical community at large. This year's roster included discussions on Aristotle, ethics, Frege, decision theory, the philosophy of language, and other mainstream topics.

The independent group meetings, on the other hand, served more specialized interests. These ranged from the traditional scholarly inquiries of groups like the Bertrand Russell Society, the International Thomas Aquinas Society, and the Leibniz Society of America, through the discussions of the North American Nietzsche Society and the Society for the Study of Ethics and Animals, to the philosophically marginal agendas of organizations like the Radical Philosophical Association, the Society for the Philosophy of Sex and Love, and the Philosophic Society for the Study of Sport. Altogether, there were over a hundred papers given on topics as diverse as "Divine Necessity," "Style, Subject, and Art in Photography," "Translating Western Philosophy into Chinese," "Radical Pedagogy: A Feminist Perspective," and "Why Truth?"

Hegel once wrote that "philosophy by its nature is something esoteric." Many would not agree, though I suppose that nearly everyone would admit that Hegel did his best to make it true. But whatever one's convictions about the intrinsic accessibility of philosophy, one has to be heartened by the amount of interest the subject still manages to attract. And *serious* interest, too. According to several seasoned philosophers I spoke with, the general level of competence in the

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discipline seems as high now as at any time in recent memory. Jobs are scarce and academic positions generally pay poorly, but a surprising number of good students continue to aspire to careers in philosophy.

One token of this interest was the size of this year's meeting. Those in charge of local arrangements estimated that attendance was up from something better than sixteen hundred last year to well over two thousand, making the eightieth meeting of the Eastern Division of the APA the largest to date. The close to ninety publishers' displays of philosophy texts told a similar tale. The book displays (which included for the first time a booth for IBM to display its microcomputers) were crowded throughout the meeting, and more than one veteran publisher reported that sales were unusually brisk.

It is no criticism of academic professional gatherings to note that their proceedings are often of greater social than intellectual interest. For if many sessions are intellectually rather dreary affairs—predictable, too long, and poorly attended—they do represent the profession communicating with itself, acquainting members with what other members are up to. And there are almost always a few eminent personages on hand to deliver papers or participate in symposia where their own work, or the work of an equally eminent colleague, is discussed.

The proceedings of the APA are in this respect typical, and, at least in recent years, there have been two or three sessions that mustered widespread enthusiasm. Often such sessions examine a text that captured the philosophical community's imagination that year, as Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* did two years ago and Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* and Hilary Putnam's *Reason, Truth, and History* did last year. Unfortunately, there were no good candidates for stardom this year; indeed, very few meetings generated more than parochial interest.

A special panel discussion on the teaching of philosophy attracted considerable attention, though in substance it hardly proceeded beyond the platitudes ("Insist that your students practice distinguishing between premises and conclusions," "Encourage them to write clearly") that constitute the staple of such investigations into pedagogy. In another symposium, less well attended, Margaret Coyne offered a paper on "Moral Luck?" challenging the idea (proposed most notably by Bernard Williams and Thomas Nagel) that being morally "lucky" poses grave problems to our conception of ourselves as moral agents. This is, of course, the kind of thing philosophers love to argue about, and many of the symposia at the APA convention were devoted to such questions. Coyne contended that, if we forego the more or less Kantian distinction between an empirical self (subject to necessity) and a transcendental self (the locus of freedom), emphasizing instead the historical character of the self, then luck can indeed be an ingredient in moral action.

Perhaps the best-attended symposium was that on "The Social Responsibility of Intellectuals." This was almost guaranteed to be a big draw not only because of its catchy title but also because professors Rorty and MacIntyre were among its participants. One would not necessarily expect intellectuals to be enlightening about the social responsibility of intellectuals, but nothing prepared one for the remarkably jejune performances of Virginia Held and Rorty, the main speakers.

Held, a professor at the City University of New York and author of the forthcoming *Rights and Goods: Justifying Social Action,* argued that intellectuals, by enjoying the leisure to intellectualize that "society" (that indispensable abstraction) grants them, assume "special responsibilities"—namely, to discern and promulgate "guidelines for the improvement of culture and the social structures in place, and for improving them at a satisfactory pace." Unfortunately, she never specified what exactly constitutes "improvement" or a "satisfactory pace," but it seemed almost nitpicking to worry about such things in the face of her breathless demand for the "liberation of culture." In any case, in order that there be more intellectuals free

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to undertake this noble charge, Held called for the segregation of "moral and aesthetic worth" from "power, including economic power," which she castigated for stifling intellectual independence. Again, it would be useful to know what is to count as "moral and aesthetic worth" and just which intellectuals we should entrust to articulate the desired "standard for society." Indeed, one might wonder why we should want to turn to intellectuals at all in this case since what we are confronted with is apparently not an intellectual but a political problem.

Because Held has little patience for such details, her vision of the independence of intellectuals threatened to degenerate into little more than ideological grandstanding. Similarly, Rorty's response, while it criticized Held's "Platonism" (that is, her appeal to values that transcend everyday opinion) and praised the social arrangements she wanted to overhaul, was neither thoughtful nor particular enough to be cogent. Only MacIntyre (who, incidentally, has been elected president of the Eastern Division of the APA for 1984) provided redeeming moments. He emphasized that the fragmentation of traditional values in our culture makes social and intellectual disagreement endemic, thus rendering Held's appeal to intellectuals as arbiters of value meaningless. "On every substantive social and moral issue," MacIntyre noted,

> intellectuals appear on opposing sides: Sowell versus Thurow, Scholem versus Arendt, Bethe versus Teller . . . . Only within a community with shared beliefs about goods and shared dispositions educated in accordance with those beliefs, both rooted in shared practices, can practical reason-giving be an ordered, teachable activity with standards of success and failure.

In some ways, Arthur C. Danto's presidential address, "Philosophy as/and/of Literature," represented the intellectual center of the convention. Several years of factional squabbling within the APA ("pluralists" versus "analysts") have brought about changes

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in election procedures, and Danto is the first president to be elected by vote of the entire regular membership rather than by nomination and vote of an executive committee. Unlike his immediate predecessors, Danto abstained from internecine controversy in his address, focusing instead on a problem that challenges the status of philosophical discourse *tout court.* His topic was the troubled relationship between philosophy and literature. On one side, philosophical semantics attempts to analyze literature in terms of philosophical categories, confusing the *meaning* of works with what they *refer* to; hence, it loses sight of the work itself. On the other side, recent trends in literary theory, viewing literature as a self-contained network of language without *any* reference to reality, read philosophy as a species of literature, thereby denying philosophy's claim to truth. Drawing on Hegel's *Aesthetics,* Danto emphasized the role of the interpreter, of the *act* of interpretation, in our understanding of a work's meaning. He was thus unwilling to treat texts, literary or philosophical, "after the manner of Derrida, simply as networks of reciprocal relationships, . . . as though they had nothing to do with us, were merely there, intricately wrought composites of logical lacework, puzzling and pretty and pointless." Displaying his gift for ingenious and witty examples, he elaborated a conception of reading that seeks to return literature to the "plane of human concern" while still allowing us to appreciate philosophy as a discourse that "continues to aim at truth."

Danto's address, exemplifying the habit of critical reflection that distinguishes philosophy as a discipline, may help explain why philosophy has proven more resistant to the kind of theoretical anarchy that has wreaked havoc on literary studies in the last decade or so. In this sense, it may be taken as a sign of health. But this is not to say that all is well with philosophy. For one thing, resistance is not yet immunity, and philosophy, too, has suffered from its share of ideological and intellectual legerdemain. Further, a depressed job market continues to demoralize the profession. One of the busiest places during the convention was the placement office, where several times a day graduate students and untenured professors would appear to scan the bulletin board for new job listings and to check their file to see if any schools they had contacted were interested enough in their intellectual wares to grant them an interview. The atmosphere was gloomy: everyone in the placement office seemed lucidly aware that the files vastly outnumbered the jobs.

On the other hand, for philosophers the question of academic employment has to be complicated by an uneasiness with the whole idea of "professional philosophy." Did not Plato repeatedly insist that only sophists, not true philosophers, accept payment for teaching philosophy? Changes in our social order and our understanding of the tasks of philosophy have obliged most modern philosophers to become sophists in Plato's sense. Of course, tenure and other bulwarks of academic freedom have arguably gone a long way toward supplying the conditions for critical independence that Plato worried about, and the emerging conception of philosophy as a collaborative enterprise of "problem solving" has led most of us to revise his austere image of the philosopher. Nevertheless, it is to the profession's credit that it continues to feel his description of the sophist as something of a reproach. Perhaps such sensitivities help explain the large quota of irony that philosophers proverbially exhibit. Near the end of the convention, I broached Plato's image of the sophist with a young philosopher I know from Rice University. "Oh, I always bring that up to my students when I'm teaching Plato," he said, "and I tell them to draw their own conclusions about me. They never do."

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Marilyn Horne's great American songbook

by Samuel Lipman

Great opera singers have always enjoyed appearing in a popular repertory. Golden Age heroes like Caruso and Gigli touched hearts and purse strings with their renditions of Italian folk songs both real and spurious. Ezio Pinza sang his way to fame on Broadway in *South Pacific,* a fame that had eluded him at the Metropolitan Opera House just a few blocks away. Helen Traubel supplemented her career as Brünnhilde and Isolde with another one performing light material in nightclubs. And in our own time the woods are full of tenor songbirds like Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo, and Peter Hofmann doing crossover material ranging from folk songs and middle-of-the-road pop to soft rock.

Of late the pickings haven't seemed so good for prima donnas. Even the career of Leontyne Price, with its obvious crossover potential, has seemed irrevocably bound to a serious operatic and song repertory. But now there's a new diva's hat in the pop market. In December, around the time of the release of her "with-the-help-of" autobiography,[1] mezzo-soprano Marilyn Horne appeared on nationwide television in a two-hour program of American songs. The concert was transmitted live from Avery Fisher Hall and featured the accompanying services of conductor Leonard Slatkin, the New York Choral Artists, and members of the American Symphony Orchestra. Presented by PBS in prime time under the "Live From Lincoln Center" seal of approval, the program was supported by, among others, Exxon, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The material Miss Horne sang was plainly meant to appeal to a broad audience. There were twenty-four songs in all, divided into five categories: folk songs, Stephen Foster, folk songs in Aaron Copland orchestrations, hymns and spirituals, and patriotic songs. Except for the Copland-orchestrated tunes, all the material was arranged specially for the occasion.

The concert began with the folk-song group. The opening piece, hardly everyone's idea of folk music, was "You're a Grand Old Flag," George M. Cohan's pastiche of famous tunes, ranging from "Auld Lang Syne" to "Stars and Stripes Forever." Though the Cohan was suitably upbeat, the rest of the folk songs declined into gloomy nostalgia. "Shenandoah" (Miss Horne's favorite song) was sung with choral backing. The result was not even corn-on-the-cob but rather creamed corn. "He's Gone Away" was presented, à la Mahler, in the manner of a tragic art song.

Five Stephen Foster songs followed. Taught to Miss Horne by her mother, these songs are plainly close to Miss Horne's heart. She began the group with "Beautiful Dreamer" and then sang, in order, "If You've Only Got a Mustache" (a novelty

1 *Marilyn Horne: My Life* by Marilyn Horne, with Jane Scovell. Atheneum, 258 pages, $16.95.

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number with music by Foster and words by George Cooper), "Jeannie With the Light Brown Hair," "Camptown Races," and finally "Gentle Annie." Here the clue to Miss Horne's approach came right at the beginning. "Beautiful Dreamer" doubtless expresses that side of the American national character which cherished gentle fantasies while it devoted almost all waking hours to the creation of a vital and often harsh reality. But "Beautiful Dreamer" is not a regret; it is an evocation of what might be. Though the song is written in 9/8 time—nine eighth notes to the bar, with three major stresses—and marked *Moderato,* Miss Horne sang it *Lento,* with a heavy stress on each note. The effect was bathetic, and was made only more marked by Miss Horne's repeated distortion of the simple opening triplet rhythm.

Especially after the self-induced and self-indulgent tragedy of "Beautiful Dreamer," "If You've Only Got a Mustache" seemed remarkably trite. "Jeannie With the Light Brown Hair" again produced a treacly mood. Sung to harp accompaniment, the song sounded repetitious and even artificial. Here a comparison with an earlier Horne performance was instructive. On an earlier "Live From Lincoln Center" program in 1979, shared with Joan Sutherland and the New York Philharmonic (conducted by Miss Sutherland's husband, Richard Bonynge), Miss Horne sang the song with the assistance of the Philharmonic's principal harpist, Myor Rosen. Mr. Rosen wrote his own arrangement (as did the American Symphony's harpist, Susan Jolles, on the present program) in collaboration with the soloist. His version was imaginative and beautifully played; throughout he seemed to be urging Miss Horne not to dally but instead to let the music flow naturally. Despite Miss Horne's obvious commitment to this material, it would appear that she has not yet learned that simple music must be performed simply.

Miss Horne's third group was made up of five pieces—"Simple Gifts," "At the River," "I bought me a cat," "Long Time Ago," and "Ching-a-ring Chaw"—drawn from the two sets of old American songs that Aaron Copland orchestrated in 1950 and 1952. Here at least the music was not clothed, as it was elsewhere in the program, in Broadway finery. Copland's acerbic, yet haunting, orchestral palette, combined with gentle intimations of syncopation, seemed doubly welcome after all the glue. But, alas, Copland was all too respectful in these pieces of the origins of the melodies he chose. Whereas these modest reworkings might have provided a charming fillip in a concert of contemporary vocal music, in Miss Horne's concert, sandwiched as they were between sweet and sweeter, both the songs and their performer seemed overcome with nostalgia.

The intermission, as is the case on all too many "Live from . . ." events, was devoted to advancing the cause of sainthood for the performer or performers of the evening. On this occasion, the formula was well in place. In paraphrase, the conversation ran something along the lines of: "Miss Horne, everyone has said you're the greatest of your kind our century has seen, if not of all time; how do *you* explain your greatness, and how can you bear the burden of it all?" And her answer: "My greatness has always seemed perfectly natural, and it has been the mission of my life to preserve this gift intact. In spite of all that I am as an artist, I remain a real, down-to-earth person nonetheless."

One comment of Miss Horne's deserves quotation as an illustration of just how fully she filled the wide-eyed role chosen for her. About her autobiography she trilled, "I think the reason the book is having such a success is because it's honest." At least she then had the grace to admit, amidst hearty laughter (opera singers are, after all, allowed to change their minds), that she certainly didn't "reveal everything." Ah candor! Ah discretion!

After intermission, the program returned to song. The opening group consisted of hymns and spirituals. The hymn "In the Garden" and the spiritual "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child" were both feelingly, and even relatively naturally, sung. Unfortunately, the egregious and ubiquitous chorus,

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harmonizing away as if every hum was a glorious tear, awakened all too many memories of the way Hollywood used to pay its dues to the upright and toiling masses of yesteryear. Of Miss Horne's rendition of "Bless This House" I cannot write without my fingers sliding off the typewriter keys. The fourth work of this group, "I just come from the fountain," seemed to me quite the best thing Miss Horne did all evening. Tellingly, she sang this short melody alone, without accompaniment. Shorn of all the saccharin and molasses supplied by her arrangers and publicists, she sang beautifully. That was, however, that. "The Lord's Prayer," closing the group, was once again stupefyingly sentimental.

The final group of the concert was composed of patriotic songs, a category wide enough to include "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," "I Didn't Raise My Boy to be a Soldier," and "God Bless America." Of all these, it was the anti-war song "I Didn't Raise My Boy to be a Soldier" that evidently touched the hearts of the audience. The stirring "Battle Hymn of the Republic" was sung in a tempo more appropriate to a dead march than to the triumphant theme song of abolitionism one had always thought it to be. The close, with chorus and orchestra clamoring away, suggested nothing so much as the massed finale of Act I of Verdi's *Aida*. The final song, "God Bless America," suffered from Miss Horne's evident need to consult her music diligently, doubtless because of complications in her part attributable to the snazzy and grandiose arrangement.

So the musical verdict on Marilyn Horne's concert, despite her undoubtedly great voice, must be negative. Her own sentimentality, the bad taste of the orchestral and choral treatment, the diva-as-girl-next-door packaging—all these taken together pose some basic questions about the whole television event. What was the artistic purpose served? What was the public purpose? Finally, why was this program on *public* television at all?

It is difficult to believe that there was a strong artistic justification for a program of this repertory sung in this way. Marilyn Horne does not bring to this material any special folk insight. Though she has sung many of these songs on and off since she was young, she does not give any evidence—as did the popular singer of the 1940s, Kate Smith—of having merged her artistic persona with the music. Instead she gave the impression famous opera stars always give when engaged in singing down to their material and their audience, of condescension masked by vulgarity.

In the absence of an artistic justification, the question of public purpose seems simple to formulate. Did this program in some sense serve to bind the nation together? Of course, many of Miss Horne's songs come from deep sources in our national psyche; of course, American popular culture has served in the past as an integrating and assimilating force. But this desirable goal can be served only when the artistic expression being so used is *authentic*. The prima donna concertizing *de haut en bas* is, however, now a sure guarantee not of authenticity but of its opposite.

Then there is the whole question of doing this program on public television. Marilyn Horne is famous; she is properly highly paid for her services; she is a commercial commodity. She plainly made every attempt to choose marketable repertory and to do it in a marketable way. The result ought to have been a natural for commercial television. In the past the major TV networks have always been interested in presenting serious music and serious musical performers in a popular format. The *Bell Telephone Hour* and Leonard Bernstein's appearances on *Omnibus* are examples of successful attempts to make good music pay. But now such efforts are rare. NBC displayed more talent at balleyhoo than commitment to culture in its two "Live from Studio 8H" programs with Zubin Mehta and the New York Philharmonic. CBS seems to have just about given up its televising of Philharmonic Children's Concerts.

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Why is commercial television so unwilling to make an investment in anything even remotely connected with "serious" music? The obvious answer is the famous "bottom line," the corporate pressure to show profit come what may. But more is involved in the networks' lack of responsibility for culture. There is now no pressure on commercial broadcasting to cater to any but the widest audience—because of the very existence of public television. It is PBS's task now to do all that fancy stuff, even if the stuff is no more fancy than "Marilyn Horne's Great American Songbook." This attitude, it must be said, fits all too well into PBS's grand design: transforming what started as *educational* television into a *de facto* fourth commercial (even though nonprofit) network.

The irony of the Marilyn Horne program is that matters artistic just might have turned out rather better had the festivities been a commercial rather than a nonprofit venture. Doubtless two hours of prime airtime would have been too expensive for this kind of program. Restricting everything to one hour would have forced a welcome sharpening of focus in the repertory performed, and provided less chance for the listener to be aware of how much the same all the different pieces were in music and in performance. Perhaps even the performances themselves could have been better. Under time pressure, Miss Horne might well have decided to take many of the songs at a faster tempo, thereby nipping her incipient sentimental instincts in the bud. But above all, had "Marilyn Horne's Great American Songbook" been on commercial television where it belonged, it would have been judged as entertainment, not as art. Freed from the burden of serving a higher cause, it might even have been accorded some of the success it reached for but failed to garner under its high-minded PBS sponsorship.

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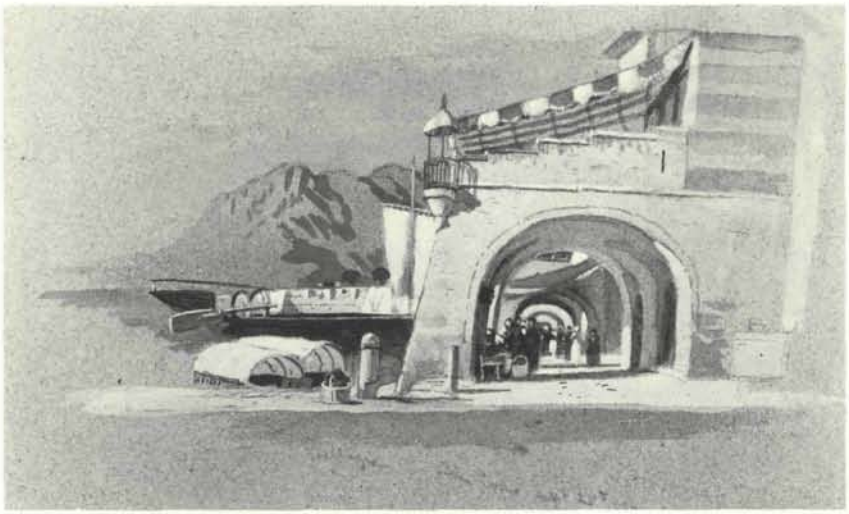

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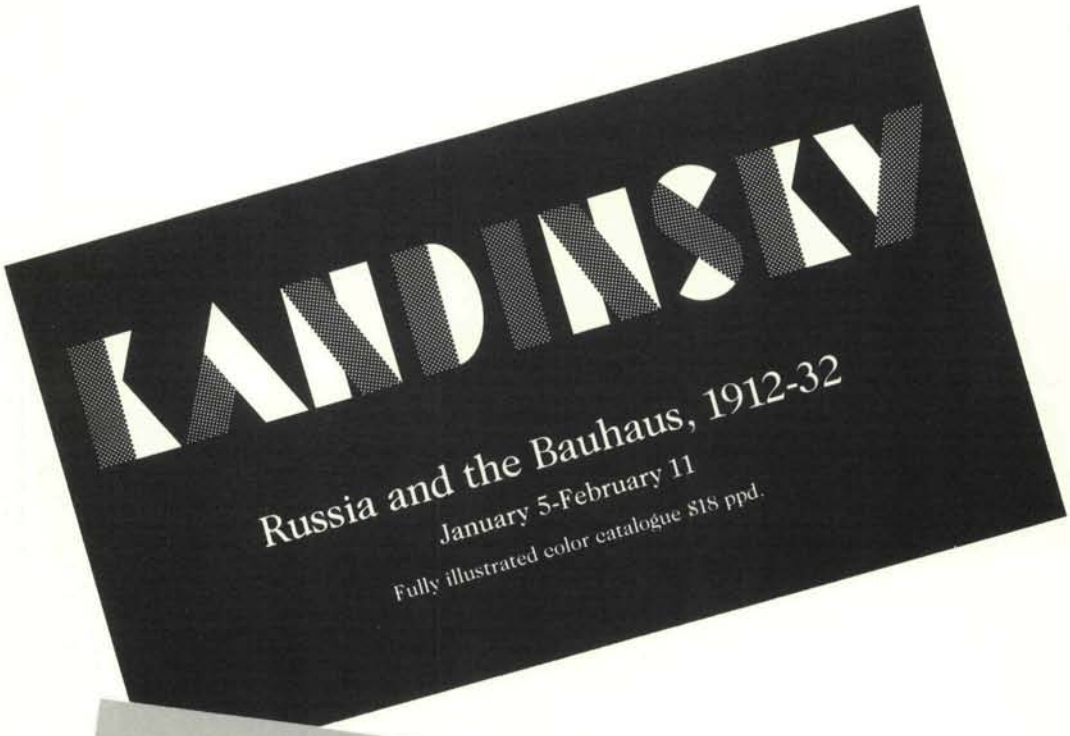

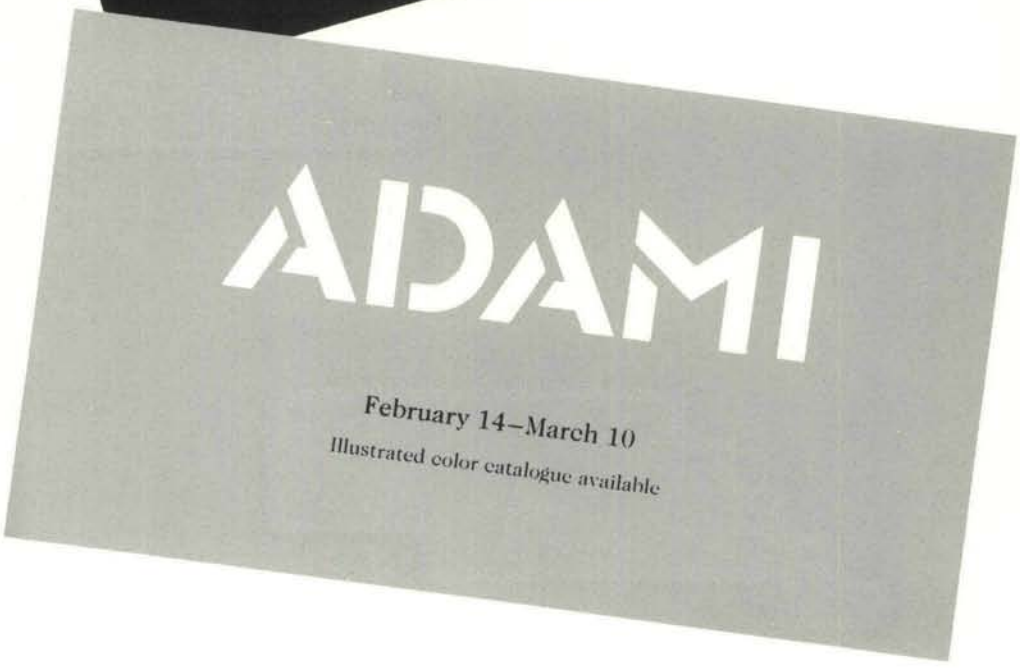

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